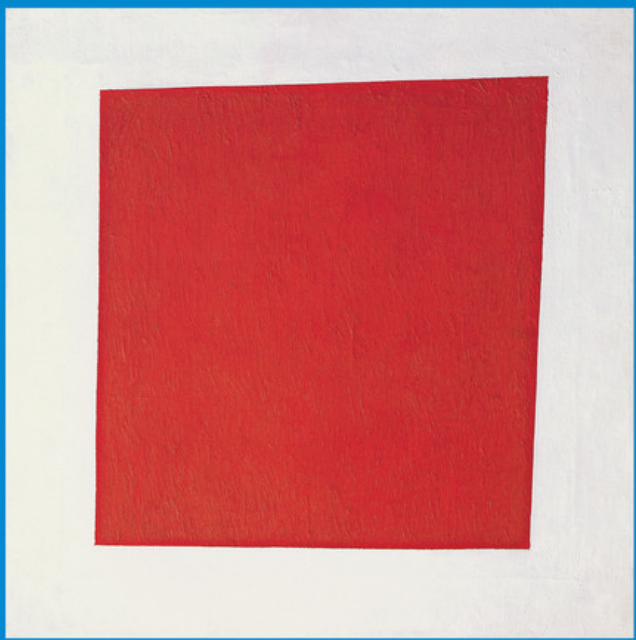
MALEVICH

Gerry Souter



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Gerry Souter

MALEVICH
Journey to Infinity

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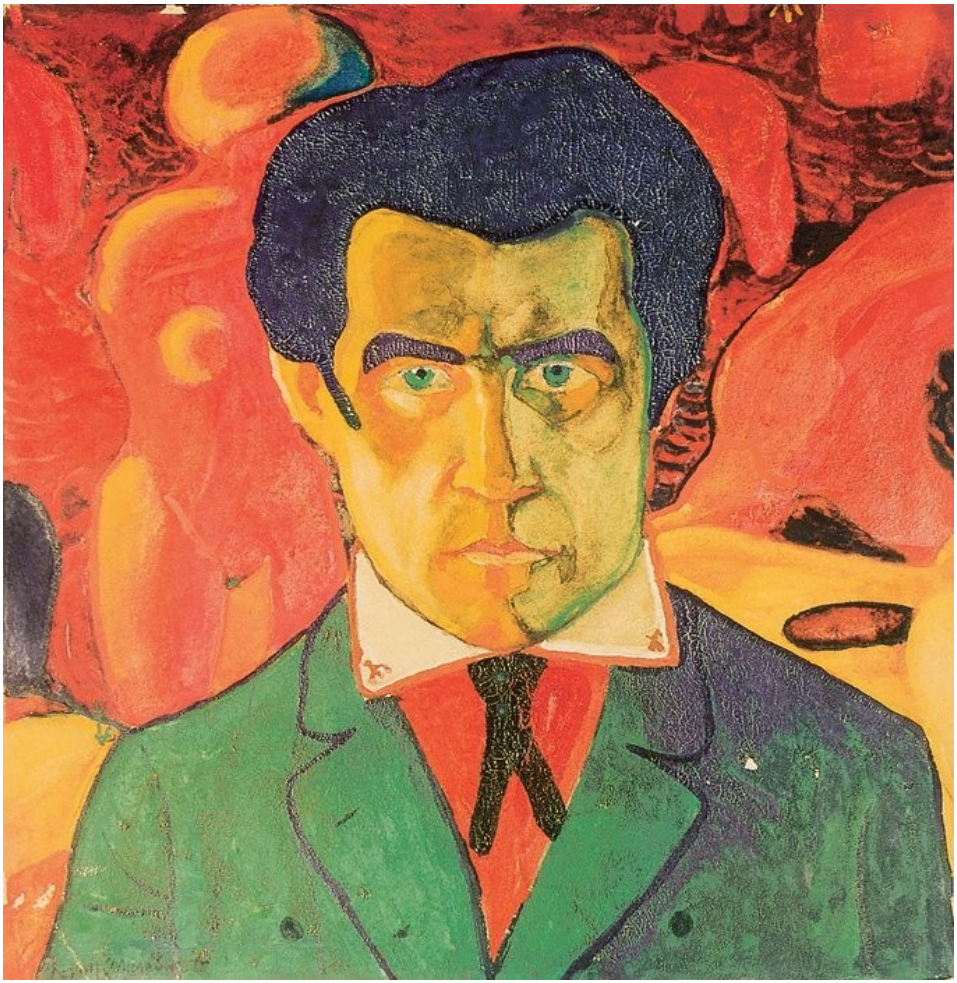


Self-Portrait, 1910-1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 27 x 26.8 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Introduction

A sudden cacophony thrust from the drone of Eastern European derivative art movements in 1915, causing the volatile art world of that time to investigate who was creating the latest fuss. They discovered a

former Figurist, former Cubist, former Futurist son of a Ukrainian sugar beet chemist. This young artist stepped out of the Russian Realist/ Futurist muddle as a fully-formed non-objective *Suprematist* with an encrypted, seemingly impenetrable visual language. There was something there, no doubt about it, but the intellect behind the images seemed either massive, or maybe it was a fragile construction assembled through osmosis? Many artists have fallen upon the works of philosophers in search of direction and from that assimilated wisdom wandered into an inspired style patched together from accumulated epiphanies. Kasimir Malevich was one of the latter. It was the *suddenness* of his ascension to the godhead that set him apart. He did not evolve. He exploded onto the art scene.

While abstract innovations such as Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism flourished in early twentieth century Western Europe and the United States, Suprematism had the misfortune to be created in the seething geopolitical cauldron of Eastern Europe. It was shaped as the Great War aligned East and West allies and empowered the power-thirsty have-nots who had been crushed beneath centuries-old Imperial regimes. Suprematism was revolutionary to a degree that it became counter-revolutionary the longer it persisted. Beneath the relentless ideology of Lenin and Stalin's iron fists there was only room for one revolution at a time. Any expression that strayed from the Communist Party line became anti-patriotic. As the Western art establishment looked on, one by one the Suprematists winked out.

Just as quickly as he had discovered this non-objective art form, Malevich abandoned it for five years of teaching and embracing the revolution. Feeling the heat of Stalin's OGPU (Unified State Political Directorate) secret police on his trail, Malevich backdated new figurative works and took up his former style with variations in an attempt to survive, but he was a marked man. He could not hide what he had done from the great grinding Patriotic Socialist Realism machine that only permitted artwork that furthered the cause of Communism. By 1935 he succumbed to cancer, and died in obscurity. The world raced from the financial ruin of the Great Depression to the scourge of another World War.

Fortunately, some of his works survived these decades of repression. A new generation can come to grips with them, bringing home-cooked interpretations, as did those in the past. While Suprematism is a footnote in the history of art, Kasimir Malevich deserves his place among the great artists. His abrupt lunge into non-objective expression sits

comfortably alongside Piet Mondrian, Yves Tanguy, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Clyfford Still, Vassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy and the flip-side of Jackson Pollock. He attempted to express the inexpressible, to make unique firings of internal synapses into shared moments of common recognition. He distilled his internal experience into the ultimate visual reduction based on a collection of philosophical constructs he embraced with religious fervour.

As with the other great non-objective artists, there lingers that great curiosity to peer behind the curtain and discover what made him tick. The life and times of Kasimir Malevich produced a marvellous up-thrust in the evolutionary flow of art history. His great contribution to non-objective art was preceded by a body of evolutionary works in Post-Impressionist, Fauvist, Cubist and Futurist styles that revealed his search for a personal vision, and was followed by an equally revealing collection of figural paintings that demonstrated vitality in the face of repression. Even though the resulting tidal wave set loose by his Suprematism eventually eroded down to a ripple, it produced a curiosity requiring an excavation of many philosophical concepts to interpret. Above all, Malevich had the courage and stamina to pursue his creation in a dangerous climate for innovation or radical ideas.

Today, we have a greater understanding of Kasimir Malevich as he existed, a captive of his time and place. The opacity of his personal philosophy has left behind a variety of equally valid interpretations, but all his interpreters agree that he was a genius. Malevich is worth our admiration and our respect.

An artist who creates rather than imitates expresses himself; his works are not reflections of nature but, instead, new realities, which are no less significant than the realities of nature itself.

Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*

A Reflection

The river empties to the sea,
But out it never flows;
The Cossack lad his fortune seeks,
But never fortune knows.
The Cossack lad has left his home,
He's left his kith and kind;
The blue sea's waters splash and foam,
Sad thoughts disturb his mind:
"Why, heedless, did you go away?
For what did you forsake
Your father old, your mother grey,
Your sweetheart, to their fate?
In foreign lands live foreign folks,
Their ways are not your way:
There will be none to share your woes
Or pass the time of day."
Across the sea, the Cossack rests —
The choppy sea's distraught.
He thought with fortune to be blessed —
Misfortune is his lot.
In vee-formation, 'cross the waves
The cranes are off for home.
The Cossack weeps – his beaten paths
With weeds are overgrown...
Taras Shevchenko
St. Petersburg, 1838.
Translated by John Weir, Toronto

I. Youth and the Steppes

Township, c. 1908. Gouache, Indian ink
and paper glued on cardboard, 17.5 x 17 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts A. N. Radiscev, Saratov.

He walked next to the wagon in boots that came almost to his knees. He was a sturdy boy with a dark complexion beneath a shock of dark brown hair and dressed in the colours of the earth except for a red waistcoat picked out in his mother's embroidery. When he travelled

with his mother and father, the family should not look like field *mujiks* but like people of quality. They earned with their brains not their backs in keeping with his father's work, a skilled chemist and quality supervisor at the next sugar beet mill and the one after that and the one after that. This was their life and the wagon was part of it. His mother, Liudvika (Liudviga) and his siblings travelled with his father, Severyn Malevich. That was the Ukrainian spelling of their names. The boy was named Kazymir. They were Poles descended from refugees who fled across the border from Poland to Ukraine when the Russians crushed the Polish rebellion in 1862. Their names had been the softer sounding Sewerin and Ludwika Malewicz.

Early on, home for Kazymir – later Kasimir in Anglicized Russian spelling – was the house of his aunt and godmother, Maria Orzechchowska, at 13 Kostiolna Street in the Zhytomyr district of the Volyn Province. He was born on February 11, 1878 and he was baptized in Kiev's Roman Catholic parish church. He was the eldest son of fourteen children born to this couple (nine would reach maturity) who counted their lineage from respected and lettered pre-revolution Polish nobles. A search of Kiev's Catholic cathedral records and the dusty archives kept by the Zhytomyr district reveals that Kasimir's pedigree was splendid, with coats-of-arms and royal recognitions bestowed on the *szlachta* (Polish nobility beginning about the fifteenth century) of the Malewicz line.

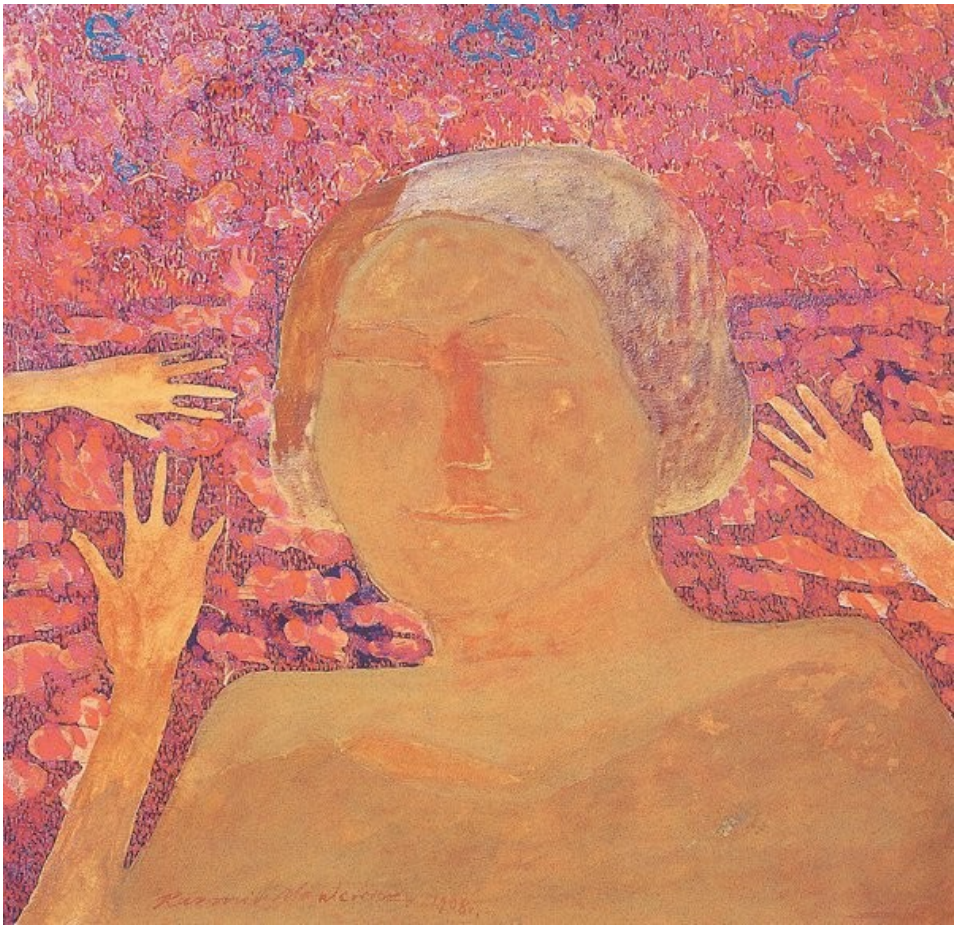
Swirling in the body of the boy who clung to the creaking wagon's tailgate chain were the genes of his great grandfather Ivan, an army artillery captain, and two cousins, one a parish priest and one a *monsignor*, who carried on a traditional attachment to the Church. The Malewicz clan formed a solid core of Polish bourgeoisie gripped by the righteous regimentation of both military and religious life into the nineteenth century. But all that play-by-the-rules sanctified bureaucracy had fled across the Russo-Polish border into Ukrainian exile and now Severyn Malevich worked for the owners of sugar beet mills.

"The circumstances of my childhood life," Kasimir later wrote, "were as follows: my father worked at sugar beet processing mills that were usually built deep in the hinterland, far away from cities big and small. There were vast sugar beet plantations. These plantations required a large, predominantly peasant workforce. While the peasants, grown-ups and children alike, worked on the plantation all through the summer and autumn, I, the future artist, feasted my eyes on the fields and colourful workers who were weeding or digging up the beets.

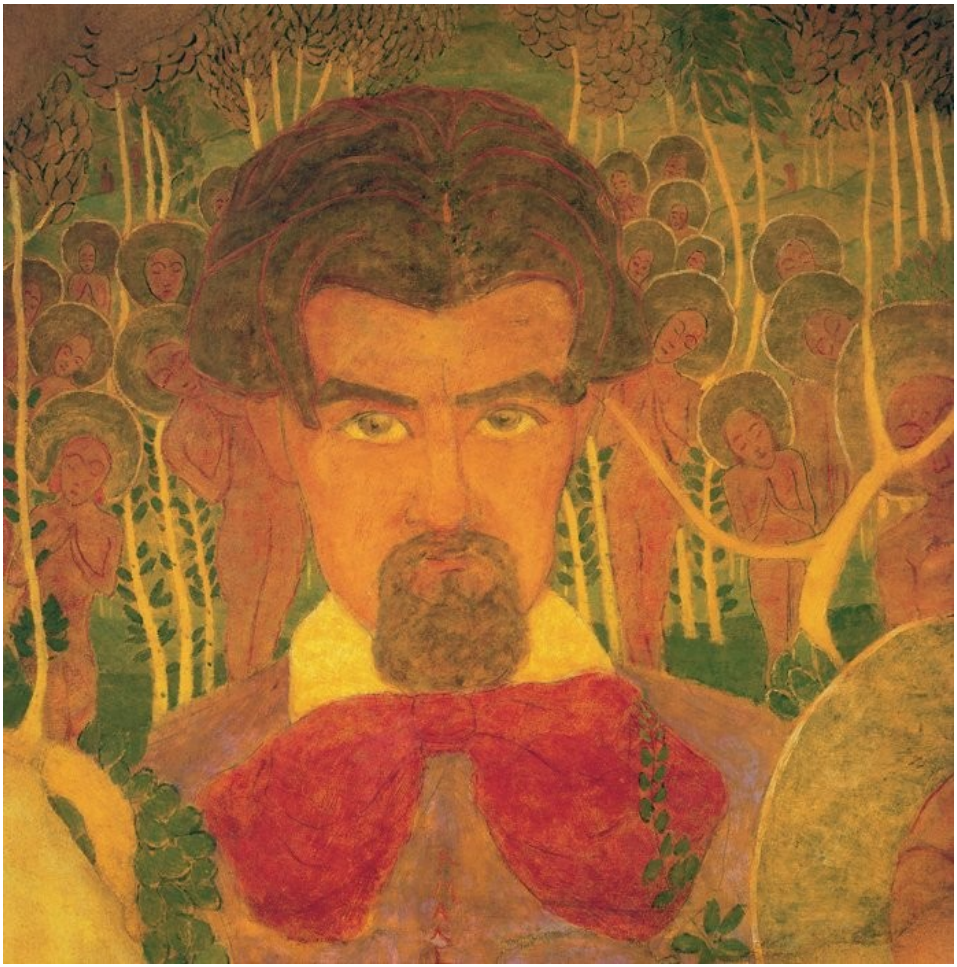
“Platoons of colourfully dressed girls stepped in single file across the field. It was a war. The troops in multi-coloured dresses fought the weeds, preventing the beets from being smothered by harmful plants. I liked watching those fields in the morning, when the sun was still low and the warbling skylarks soared… There seemed to be no end to the sugar beet plantations which merged with the distant skyline… embracing the villages with their green hands. My childhood passed among all those villages that were located at good places and put together a wonderful landscape.”

But his memories turned grey and leaden when he wrote of his own life in the factory towns where money could be earned at shift labour.

“Another territory – the factory – reminded me of some sort of a fortress where people, under an influence of a siren, worked day and night. There were people riveted by time to an apparatus or a machine: twelve hours in steam, smells, and dirt. I remember my father when he stood near the big apparatus. That was a really beautiful machine with plenty of different sizes and bits of glass, small windows in which it was possible to look through and see how the sugar syrup boiled. There were several small bright taps near every window, a thermometer, and on the table a set of glasses for tests and determining the level of sugar crystallization. For hours my father stood and turned on and off taps, looked through the windows. From time to time he took a sample of sugary liquid in a glass and, attentively, examined it against a light to see the size of formed crystals.



Woman in Childbirth, 1908.
Gouache on cardboard, 24 x 25 cm.
Costakis Collection, Athens.



Self-Portrait (study for a fresco), 1907.
Tempera on cardboard, 69.3 x 70 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Very carefully, every worker watched the movements of machines as though they were the movements of a wild beast. At the same time, it was necessary to look after yourself, after your own actions. Any wrong movement could threaten either death or many kinds of injury. For me, as a child, all those machines always appeared like wild beasts. I looked on them as on wild relentless animals that only looked for any opportunities to knock down or injure their own enslavers. Enormous fly-wheels and belts always impressed me by their movements and

structures. Some machines were fenced in behind metal rods and seemed as dogs in a cage. The other, less dangerous machines, were without fences."[1]

Kasimir's world was divided between two very distinct ways of life, the factory people and the peasant workers. The factory workers lived at or near the processing plant in company housing – if they had families – or had bunks in a barracks. They worked in shifts to service the machines and maintain the sugar refining process 24 hours a day during the harvest. The workers were a grey society, faceless labourers and technocrats – like his father – called to their shifts by the whine of the same siren that awakened them from their work trance to retreat to their meals and beds. The smells that haunted the corridors of heavy industry, besides the oil, hot grease, steam, sweat and the stench of the cooking beets were the dinner smells of *sauerkraut*, cabbage soup and porridge mixed with beef fat.

The stink from the cabbage-soup spread over the entire barracks and even out into the street. It wafted from the small houses rented by the technical workers and exuded from the men's barracks along with the smells of unwashed sheets, sweat-stiffened clothes and the community privies.

Kasimir was part of this workers' society and he did not like it. The peasant farmers, on the other hand, slept all night long, went into fields in the morning, and worked in the fresh air in a beautiful landscape brightened by morning, midday, and golden evening sun. Peasants ate strips of rendered pork fat – *salo* – with garlic and Ukrainian *borscht* made from freshly-dug beetroots, a cold green vegetable soup called *botvinia* made with fish, beans, potatoes and beets. They also enjoyed soured cream and dumplings with onion, *palyanitsa*, a flat cake, and *mamalyga*, a form of corn meal (polenta) with milk or butter, and cold buttermilk with potatoes.

"I preferred to have friendships with peasants' children, considering them always free to live in the fields, meadows, and woods with horses, sheep and pigs. I always envied peasants' children who lived, as it seemed to me, free in nature. They grazed horses or huge herds of pigs. In the evening, they came back home astride the pigs holding onto their ears. Pigs galloped with squeals, much faster than horses and raised plenty of dust on village roads."[2]

His romantic vision of the world around him, written many years later in his 1918 autobiography, bears small resemblance to the reality of life upon the great flatness of the forest-steppe in 1890 Ukraine. This

belt of natural savannah, a rich grassland left behind by the grinding retreat of the glaciers, cuts across the centre of the country covering about thirty-five per cent of the Ukraine. It stretches from the shores of the Black Sea to eastern Kazakhstan and is buried deep in *chomozem,* an extremely fertile black earth. This soil, complemented by a temperate climate ranging from 25 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 70 degrees in July, guarantees a generous crop cycle for both wheat and sugar beet – if the land is maintained.

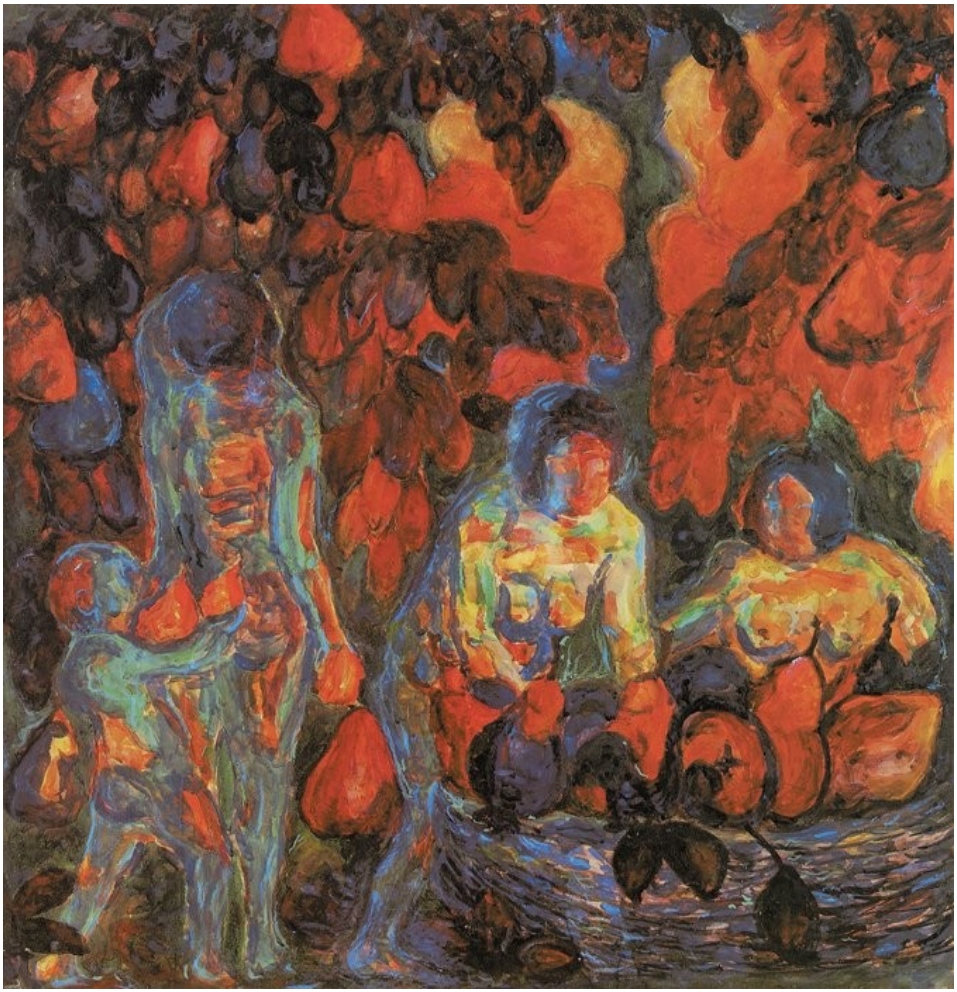
The "colourfully dressed girls" who formed a file across the broad black field were part of the peasant "army" who fought his "war" against weeds and the thinning of the sugar beet to achieve larger, well-fed plants at harvest time. Dotted across the steppes were farms and small villages originally peopled by serfs brought into the area by nobles who had purchased vast tracts of land. Villages (*selos*) were built and the serfs worked the noble landholders' acres. Each household owed their master a certain number of hours (a *corvée)* in the fields based on the family's number of grown sons. When the serfs were emancipated in 1861, many of these peasants left the "company villages" and settled on individual farmsteads or *Khutor*. Some of the individual farms formed settlements known as *vyselki* (literally, "those who moved away from their village").

Sugar was necessary in the life of Central Europe both as a sweetener and as a preservative. The sugar beet was a less efficient provider of this commodity than sugar cane from equatorial climates, but its refined product harvested in great volumes was very profitable and in constant demand. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the sugar beet's care, harvest and refining was very labour intensive.

[1] Kasimir Malevich, *Autobiography of Youth and Early Years*, translated from Russian by Julia Karpovich, 1918.

[2] *Ibid.*

Oaks and Dryads, 1908.
Watercolour and gouache on cardboard,
17.7 x 18.5 cm. Location unknown.



Fruit Gathering/Abundance, 1909.
Gouache on cardboard, 52.7 x 51 cm.
Hardziev-Caga Foundation, Amsterdam.

Severyn Malevich was an itinerant mill employee; his travels took him across the steppes to the far-flung facilities. When young Kasimir travelled with him, the cycle of the earth and the culture of the peasant class became imprinted on the boy forever. The roads to the mills led through villages, down the dirt main streets and past the simple cottages equally spaced on either side. Each cottage had a small garden for vegetables and both dairy cattle and goats were kept for milk and

cheese.

Animal dung was saved for fertilizer and to mix with the clay as a binder trowelled onto the cottage floors. Sewage disposal was handled by open-air cesspits. He could smell the town long before he saw it if the wind was in the right direction. Farmstead settlements were less rigidly defined, but gathering together allowed the community to share wood hauled from the distant pine forests that lined sandy river terraces. They portioned out animal feed for the winter when inches of snow clogged the roads and covered the islands of oak but melted quickly when the sun heated the black earth, leaving ebony patches against ivory whiteness.

How many times did the Malevich family pause in a village during a celebration, a wedding, a First Communion or a birth? The villagers seized upon any chance to depart from the daily trek to the fields. It was a time to eat and dance to the music of the *banduras,* stringed instruments unique to the Ukraine, and *tsymbaly*, a type of dulcimer played with small wooden mallets. They accompanied songs once made popular by *Kobzars*, travelling musicians who wandered from village to village singing about the feats of the Ukraine Cossacks, and other folk tunes and sentimental ballads. Men danced in their embroidered shirts and *sharovary* (trousers) made of blue wool and fastened with wrappings of a bright red sash tied at the side. Over this, they wore *syyta* (outerwear), a long open vest trimmed in black cord, and on their heads a Persian lamb hat. Their feet were shod with their finest tall red leather boots.

Single women danced and passed around trays of homemade treats, keeping their eyes on the unmarried sons of the farmstead holders. These sturdy girls also wore embroidered blouses, black velvet trimmed waistcoats (*kerselka*) over a woven *plakhta* (skirt), a wreath of ribbons in their hair and, like the men, high red leather morocco boots. The older married women, mothers, aunts and grandmothers, brought out their finest cross-stitched embroidery. They wore embroidered *ochipoks* (head coverings); coral necklaces decorated with *dukachi* (silver or gold coins) *iupkas* (coats) with *kovtunts* (scattered tufts on the fabric).

And besides the swirling colours of the costumes and the chink of the coins strung together as jewellery and the plucked strings of the *banduras* and complex patterns played upon the *tsymbaly,* there was the silent audience of icons looking down from the walls. Every house had at least one icon, sometimes as many as six or ten. They were the art and religion of the peasants. There were idealized faces, faces in rapture,

faces squeezed tight by the pain of repentance, saints and apostles, scenes from the Bible and stylized folk scenes barely tolerated by the Church in this holy art form. All were painted on boards or on home-woven canvas. The "burning bush icon" kept fire away from the house and the health of domestic animals was in the hands of the "icon of Saint George."

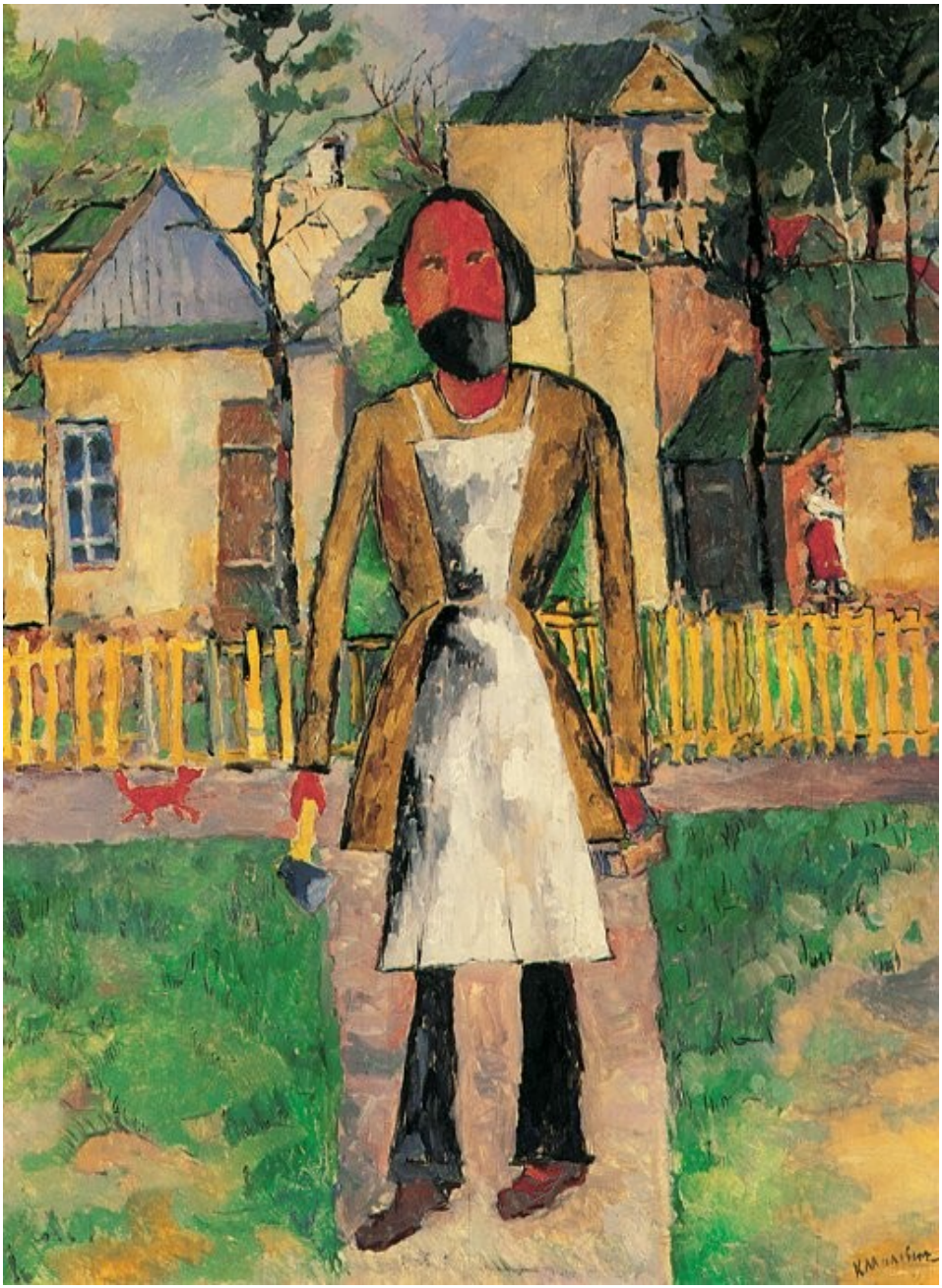
The icon artists were known as the *bohmazy* ("*boh*" means God and "*mazy"* means to paint on the surface). These peasants learned their painting skills through apprenticeship. The artist farmers and herders rarely left the settlement so each region on the steppes had its own "style" of *bohmazy* as the local designs and techniques were passed on to each generation.

To own a house, of course, was a symbol of prosperity for any peasant family and they displayed that pride of ownership on almost every interior surface with intricate colour designs and patterns. Walls, shutters, ceilings, doorways, chairs, stools and benches were the creative outlets for woodworkers and carpenters, each with their unique interpretation of traditional motifs. The women and girls in the family learned to paint as well as to weave and cross-stitch. It was their job to add colour to the log and clay walls.

Kasimir wrote of this time: "The villagers …were making art (I did not know the word for this yet). I was very excited to watch the peasants paint; I helped them cover the floors of their houses with clay and paint motifs onto the stoves."

The Shroud of Christ, 1908.
Gouache on cardboard, 23.4 x 34.3 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

At the Dacha/Carpenter II, motif: 1911-1912, version: 1928-1929. Oil on plywood, 105 x 70 cm. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Carpenter I, motif: 1911-1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 71.8 x 53.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The local artists ground their own colours from available minerals but when Kasimir tried this process at home, he was chided for making a mess.

Kasimir loved the untutored wildness of his life away from the factory town. He attached unabashed sensual pleasure to the farm workers' voluptuous lifestyle. He wrote: "All of the peasants' life fascinated me. I decided that I would never look and work in factories; moreover, I would never study at all. I thought that peasants lived very well: they own everything they want and don't need any factories or reading and writing. They produce everything for themselves, even paint. They also have honey, so it is not necessary for them to make sugar. Any village's old men have an abundance of honey just sitting the entire summer at an apiary, located somewhere amidst a blooming garden, a beautiful garden full of pear trees, apple trees, plum trees and cherry trees. Oh, how delicious were those apples, pears, plums and cherries ripened in the gardens! I really liked to eat *vareniky* (small pies) with cherries and sour cream or honey.

I eagerly imitated the entire peasants' lifestyle. As they did, I rubbed a piece of bread with garlic, ate *salo* (bacon) holding it up with my fingers, ran barefoot around the neighbourhood and considered wearing boots unnecessary. Villagers always seemed to me neat and well-dressed."

But when the celebration fires were only fragrant smouldering ash, work boots were tugged on and teams of Russian heavy draught horses were led out of their stalls, sickles and billhooks were collected and loaded into the wagons with the weeding hoes and lunch baskets. The visitors climbed aboard their wagon and continued down the road toward the distant refining mill. A few friends in the village said a quiet prayer to the icon of St Nicholas who protected travellers.

From the wagon's sprung seat, Kasimir watched the dancers and singers and musicians from the night before as they spread out across the fields, finding where they had left off and resuming their plodding march traversing the dew-steaming blackness. They followed the ploughs drawn by the huge chestnut horses with the blond manes, and the beets were uncovered, shaken loose of their soil coating and laid beside the row. The next worker carried a short sickle or a beet hook to sever the leaves and trim off the beet's crown, making it ready to be forked into a following horse cart. And so went the endless stooped

labour that broke their backs and aged them quickly as the sun rose, bringing with it the smells of the horses' sweat and dung, the rising aroma of disturbed black earth and the nutty scent of the beets in the warmth of a late summer day on the steppe.

Being on the move rarely led to lasting friendships, so Kasimir was always the "new boy" in refinery town or rural village. His fearless curiosity often led to beatings from gangs of local boys:

"Once, I got very angry against the factory's boys, so I declared a war on them. I hired an army from village children and paid them one piece of refined sugar per day. I stole a whole pound of the refined sugar from my house – a carton where there were fifty-four pieces of refined sugar. This pound provided me the army of fifty-four people. If the war would continue for two or three days, I should pay the piece of refined sugar per day to everyone. My army and I got ready to fight: we made bows from metal hoops that held together sugar barrels and arrows with tarred points from reeds. Every warrior had to have no less then seventy arrows. Factory boys didn't doze either; they were all set too. In the evening, before the day of the battle, my army and I shot at passing factory boys one by one. One the next day, the fight continued for all day long until we kicked them out from their position behind the fence and just gained the rear of them through a firewood storehouse. The battle was ended when my arrow hit the factory leader in an eye, but his arrow passed over me. We fired point-blank at each other.

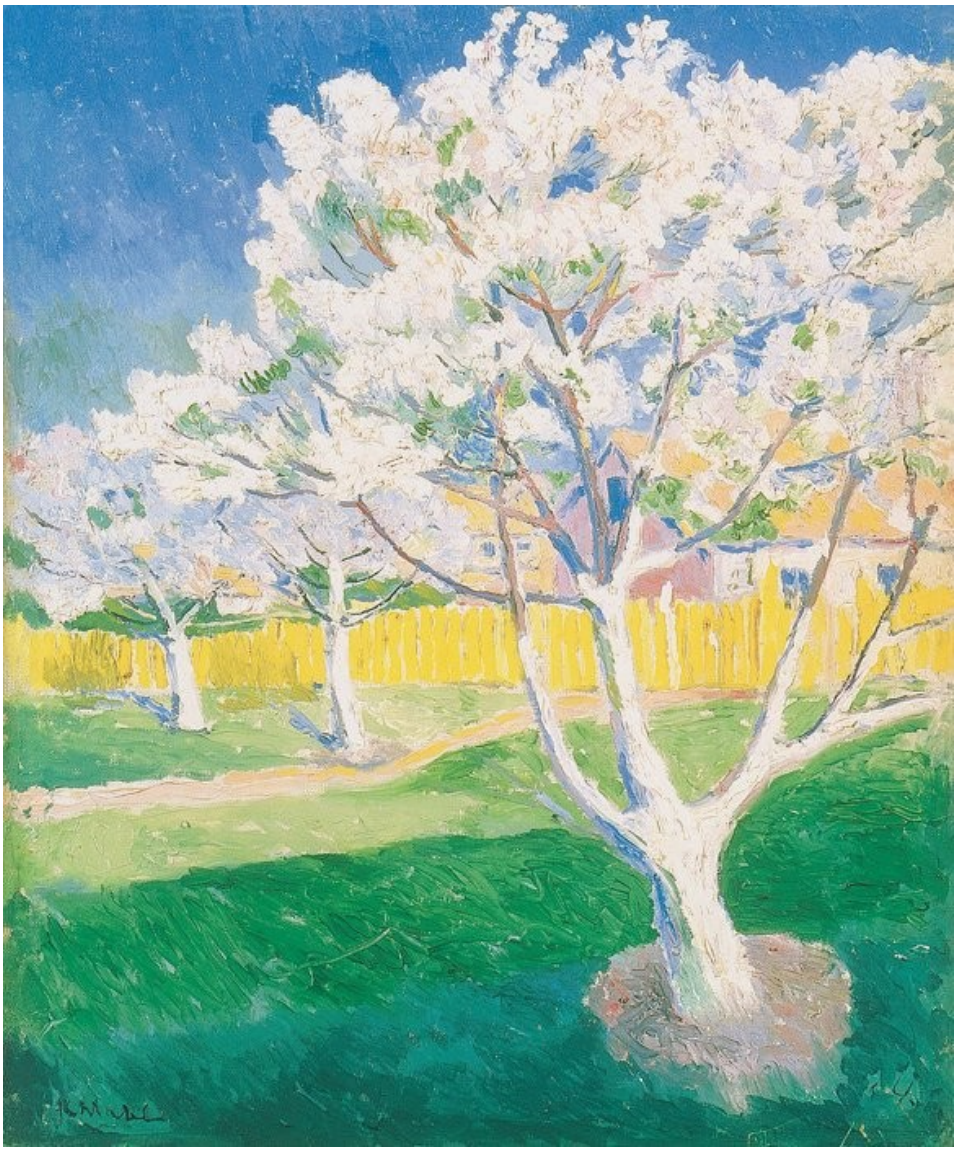
That was a true fight. When I came home at the end of that day, my father punished me very hard. I bore my disgrace, but, deep inside, I felt myself as a hero."[3]

When Kasimir reached the age of eleven, the peripatetic life of the steppe roads and the company houses and apartments at the refining mills was becoming a strain. The family had grown and Severyn Malevich settled and worked at a plant in the village of Parhomovka, which bordered three areas, Kharkov, Poltava and Sumy, and was midway between two of the Ukraine's most important cities: Kiev and Kursk. The village had a five-class school and Kasimir became a town boy going to school until 1894. The people in Parhomovka remember him as a poor boy who never stopped asking questions.

[3] *Ibid.*

The Harvesters, motif: 1911, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on wood pannel, 70.3 x 103.4 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

II. The Discovery of Art and His Experimentations: Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism



Apple Trees in Bloom,
motif: c. 1906, version: end of 1920s.
Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 49.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Discovering the "Art" within him

Kasimir was twelve years old and had prepared watercolour paints and made his own brushes. He had practised drawing horses in different views placing them in landscapes and with people. He had painted them whatever colour he had mixed, working with a friend who also had ambitions to be an artist. It was here he saw his first professional artists who came from St. Petersburg to decorate a church. Kasimir wrote of this very special event:

"At this time we lived in a small city, Belopolya in the Kharkov province, in which I found a comrade very devoted to drawing. My friend was far ahead of me in manufacturing paint. He had flat stones on which he ground them. We made paints not only of various kinds of clays, but also from some powders. We prepared both watercolour and oil paints. We did not prefer oil paints and worked mostly with watercolours.

One day, my friend came running to my house, pulled me outside behind a gate and, being out of breath, whispered to me, 'I've heard my uncle tell my aunt that the most well-known artists are coming here from St. Petersburg to paint icons in the cathedral.'"

Kasimir and his friend had never seen real artists before. Each day, they eavesdropped on their elders' conversations and listened at keyholes to find out when the artists were scheduled to arrive.

Finally the three artists arrived by train. The parishioners were more concerned about repairs to the cathedral and gathering money to pay for the work than about the artists. Kasimir and his friend were desperately interested only in the artists. They needed to sneak into the church and watch how these well-known artists worked. For days and nights, the boys examined the windows of the church to find where they might squeeze through. Kasimir's friend was a well-known resident of Belopolya and his job was to find out where the artists were lodging. Unfortunately he refused to ask his uncle about them, because it was a

secret.

The boys spent time walking up and down the main street of Belopolya, Kasimir on one side and his friend on the other, peering into people's faces, searching for the artists. Any stranger was visible at once in Belopolya. Morning and evening, they stood by the main bakery and the deli market, but the only people on the street were familiar residents of the town. Finally, they decided it was easier to stay by the cathedral.

They tried taking turns when each had to go home for dinner, but finally they took food with them and stayed by the cathedral full time. But there was no sign of the artists.

A few days of fruitless waiting passed but on one hot evening, after a swim in the river, they suddenly saw boys and girls peering in the windows of a house located on the outermost street of Belopolya. They joined the other children and discovered, "…Many small pieces of 'fabric' (as we named it) with heads of boys, girls and also cows drinking water painted on them hanging on walls all around the brightly illuminated room. The artists walked in the room. There were three of them. We examined them as an unknown rarity and were amazed by their long hair and special shirts (smocks?)."

After a sleepless night, the boys hurried back to the house before sunrise. The sun rose and the cows were driven out, but the artists remained inside.

"At last, the window opened and an artist looked out on the street. We stepped aside, pretending that we were interested in kitchen gardens nearby. In an hour a gate opened and the artists appeared before our eyes. They had boxes on belts hung upon their shoulders, umbrellas and other strange things. They were dressed in shirts, bluish trousers and boots. The artists went out of town; we followed behind them. There were fields under rye and wheat with mills on them and a forest of oaks in the distance -. We sneaked in the rye where we were not visible, but on the wheat field we had to creep. As soon as the artists reached a mill they settled down, set out their boxes, opened umbrellas and began to paint."

It is instructive to read Kasimir's words and imagine how these artists, hung about with their paint boxes, easels, water cans, food and wine baskets and dressed in their painter's smocks must gave looked so alien. Where the artists from the city aware of the two stalking boys and did they put on a show for their amusement? This is a rare look at artistic culture shock.

"Carefully and thoroughly, we examined any detail," Kasimir went

on, "…nothing escaped our attention. We desired to see how and what they were going to do. Holding our breath, we crept on our stomachs in the most cautious way. We managed to crawl up very close. We saw colour tubes from which paint was pressed and that was very interesting. A sky, a mill, and so forth showed up gradually on each 'fabric'.

There was no end to our excitement. We spent two hours lying there. Then, the artists put aside their work and gathered together in the shade of the mill to have breakfast. They spoke loudly in Russian and laughed. Taking advantage of this occasion, we crept away through the rye the same way back and then, when we got out from the field, we ran away at top speed."[4]

The experience of seeing these three artists at work creating paintings was so heady that Kasimir and his friend considered running away to St. Petersburg with the men when they returned from working on the cathedral. But their enthusiasm sobered when they considered running out on their parents, and then the two youngsters were separated when Kasmir's father packed up the family yet again and moved to a sugar factory in Volchok in the Chernigov Province, thirteen miles from Konotop.

Once again, Kasimir was among new town people, but this time his drawings and paintings attracted the interest of the factory engineers, who prevailed on Severyn Malevich to send his son to art school. Kasimir took up their pestering as he copied pictures from the magazine *Niva* ("Wheatfield"). This magazine was much like the later *New Yorker*, a three-column format with poems and illustrations by Russian artists scattered among the pages. Later, when the Bolsheviks came to power, the magazine was shut down.

To silence the constant badgering from his son and his colleagues, the elder Malevich wrote a letter to the Moscow Art School, but instead of mailing it, he hid the letter away in a drawer and three months later announced to Kasimir he had heard from the school and there was no place for his son in its classes.

But Kasimir's exposure to art had possessed him. The scene of the artists painting at that mill on the steppe continued to haunt his thoughts. He wrote in his 1918 memoir:

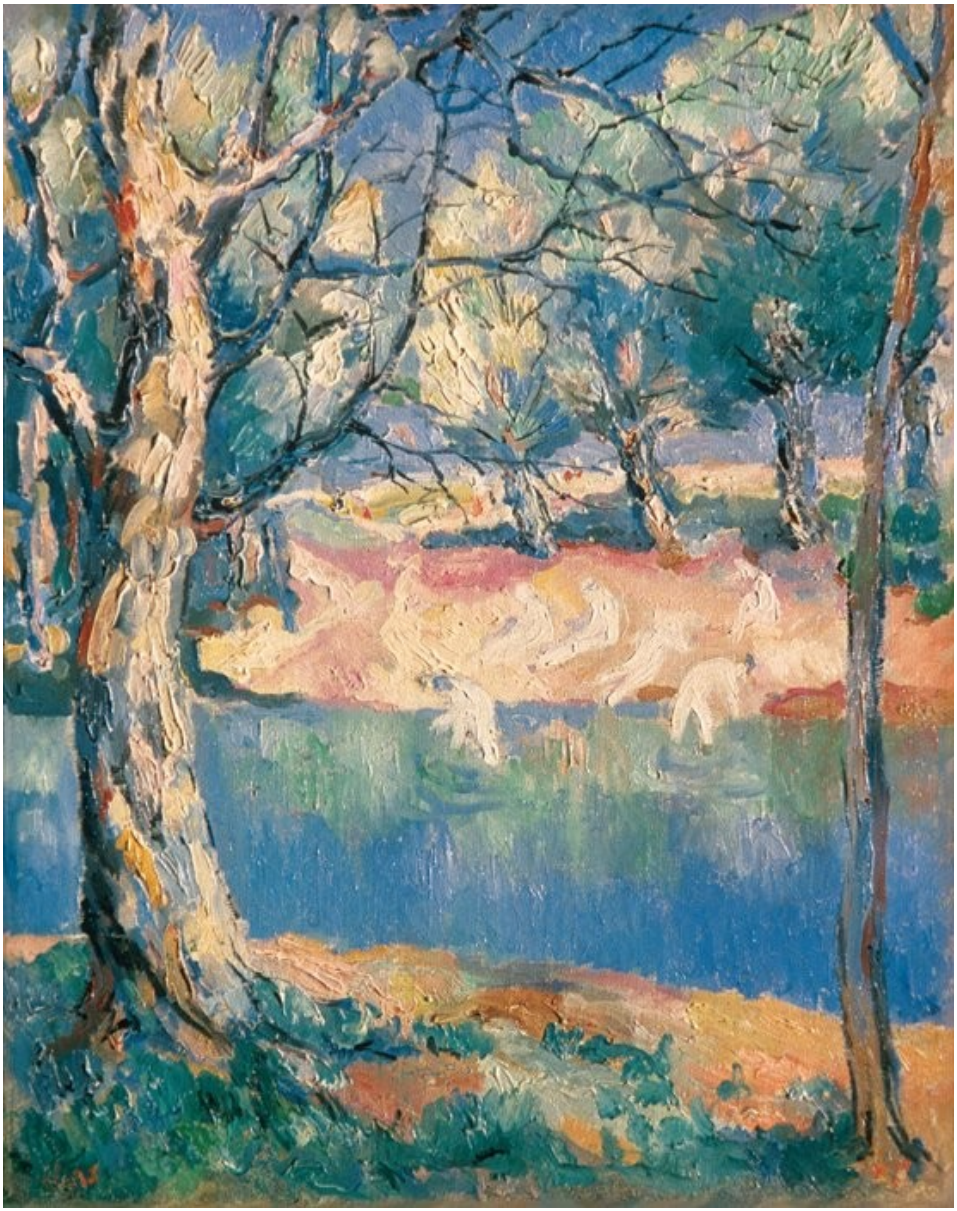
"Tubes, palettes, brushes, umbrellas and a folding-chair from Belopolya never left my mind in peace. I was sixteen years old. I already drew everything, cows, horses, and people and I did it, as it seemed to me, as well as artists drew in magazines. At sixteen, I went to Kiev with

my mother where she bought me everything that a salesman at the art shop told her to buy.

[4] *Ibid.*

Church, c. 1906. Oil on cardboard,
60.3 x 44 cm. Private Collection.

A Garden in Bloom, motif: c. 1906, version: end of 1920s.
Oil on canvas, 45 x 66 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.



A River in the Forest,
motif: c. 1910-1911, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 53 x 41.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

I spent my time then in Konotop. Oh, a lovely city Konotop; it all shone like slabs of pig fat (*salo*). On markets and near the train station behind the long lines of tables sat women, whom people called *salnitsy*. The smell of garlic spread from them. Those tables were overloaded with different kinds of meat and *salo,* smoked and not smoked, with good crust. There laid rings of sausages: Krakow sausages stuffed with large pieces of meat and pig fat, blood sausages, other sausages with an unusual aroma excited all glands which any person has. Also those tables were piled up with ham with a little fat on the edges, rolls of round porridge mixed with lamb fat (*salniky*) and variety of round headcheese. The women who sold those delicacies glistened with the grease and their clothes reflected the beams of the sun.

I bought a ring of sausage for five kopeks and then I broke it in pieces and ate like other people did while they walked around the markets. I did not even look at meat or lamb which cost one and a half kopeks for a pound. Pork was my favourite dish, that and fish. Particularly, I liked dry-cured fish, two kopeks apiece, big and fatty, with caviar. I loved to eat pork and fish with white bread. Or, sometimes, I purchased from the *salnitsy* a whole piglet for forty kopeks, roasted with brown crust which was saturated with fat. The roasted crust crackled in the teeth and I ate the whole piglet, keeping it a secret from my family."

Kasimir Malevich indulged his senses and made the most of his separation from the restrictions and drabness of the factory towns where his father laboured. That his later recollections seemed to centre around rich food and the abundant markets where tables groaned under these delicacies hints that at the time of writing his own larder was thinly stocked. As a thirsty man can only think of water, so a hungry man feeds his fantasies with imagined and remembered plenty.

But if his gastronomic excesses bordered on gluttony, his observations of the countryside did not ignore some of the downsides to country living.

"I grew up among all that Ukrainian *salo* and garlic in Konotop. It was one, very pleasant side of Konotop. The other characteristic of Konotop was an impassable swamp when it rained and extreme dust during dry time. When a *telega* (a long narrow wagon with sides that sloped up and out from the flat bed) went along the street during the dry season, it lifted such dust that neither horses nor houses would visible."

There were stories told about when Ekaterina II (a familiar

nickname of Catherine the Great 1729-1796) passed through this town, her horses sank in a bog of streets. From then, the city became known as Konotop - a swampy landscape or a horse-ford where horses drowned. The main street, as always in cities, was named Nevsky Prospect (after the medieval Russian warrior prince, Alexander Nevsky).

"Wood planks were placed on the both sides of Konotop's Nevsky Prospect," he continues his narrative, "just in case of rain. When *chernozem* (black earth) dissolved to an *arshin* (28 inches) in depth, people walked on these boards. Pigs with their piglets lay in the middle of Nevsky Prospect, rooting up the ground or rummaging in slops which were poured out from courtyards directly into the street. I lived far away from the Prospect in a very pretty small Ukrainian house which was surrounded by a garden."

He painted his first picture *Moonlight Night* by drawing from his imagination, his "impression" as he had done in Belopolya. He drew from memory rather than from nature, because he did not yet have the means or skill to match nature's colours with his paints. During the shopping trip with his mother, a prudent salesman sold them a book written by Professor F. Lennike that had been translated into Russian in 1895, *Practical Guidance of Painting on Porcelain, Faience and So Forth*, which stated how to draw portraits and landscapes. According to Lennike, it was necessary to use no less than fifty-four "bodily" paints to paint a portrait and no fewer colours to achieve a "grassy" landscape. Malevich could not understand why that quantity of colours was necessary, and continued to paint as he had with his limited palette that "…matched his impression".

Two Sisters II, motif: 1910, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 76 x 101 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The Unemployed Girl,
motif: 1904, version: end of 1920s.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 66 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The Flower Girl III, motif: 1904-1905,
version: end of 1920s. Oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Kasimir remembered, “My first painting on a canvas, a size of one and three quarter *arshin*, was titled *Moonlight Night*. It was a landscape with a river, stones and a moored little boat. The reflection of beams of the moon in the picture, as I’ve been told, was like reality. This picture made a really big impression on all of my friends. One of them, with a commercial vein, urged me to display this picture in stationer’s shop on Nevsky Prospect, but I was against it because I was terribly over-modest. That was a strange condition – I, if it is possible to say, was ashamed to show my work which I had made with great pleasure. But my comrade took away my *Moonlight Night* without my permission. The owner of the shop was amazed by this picture. With pleasure, he took my work and, as my friend said, displayed it in a window of the shop. I went to take a look at my first exhibition too, but I was afraid that others might find out that I was the artist. Officials stopped, looked and looked... The

picture was not displayed for long; it was purchased for five roubles. It was a fortune: it was possible to eat sausages – a ring daily – for a whole month. The owner of the shop asked me to bring another *Moonlight Night* but this time with a windmill. Actually, I painted a different picture, double the size of my first one. It represented a grove with storks. It was sold too."

It is interesting to watch Malevich come out of his shell and be less defensive about his peasant status. Through his own talent, he managed to raise his self-esteem to the level of the artists he admired. He had painted for people he did not know, who were not relatives, and had admired and paid good roubles for his efforts. His success only fired his need to learn more.

By 1896, Severyn Malevich moved his sizeable family to even more permanent quarters in Kursk and went to work for the railway as a clerk in the management office. While there, he made a journey to Kiev and Kasimir accompanied him, remembering the trip later.

"Once a year all sugar factories met in Kiev. At the same time a great fair was arranged and merchants from all countries came there. Sugar-factory owners or managing directors came to the fair to make new contracts and hire different specialists or experts in sugar refining. That is why among barracks dwellers and famers the fair was important to receive future contracts. My father, as a highly skilled sugar maker, came to get these contracts too and took me with him. Consequently, I got acquainted with the city and its life as well as with art which was shown in show-windows of stationery shops."

Kasimir wasn't much interested in the fair although it was a remarkable event. While his father tended to business, Kasimir hurried from shop to shop and looked for hours at pictures. Thus, little by little, Kiev became a new environment that influenced him and opened a new appreciation of art.

He understood nothing then about the difference between the art of the Kiev painters and the folk art of the villagers, but emotionally he accepted them both - with excitement and a great desire to draw the same skilfully-done pictures himself. He did not know that there were many art schools where people were trained in painting, but thought that all those pictures were drawn in the same manner as peasants drew flowers, horses and cocks – by rote and repetition without any schools or studies.

"One displayed picture impressed me strongly. In Kiev art, everything was represented very vivid and natural. The picture that

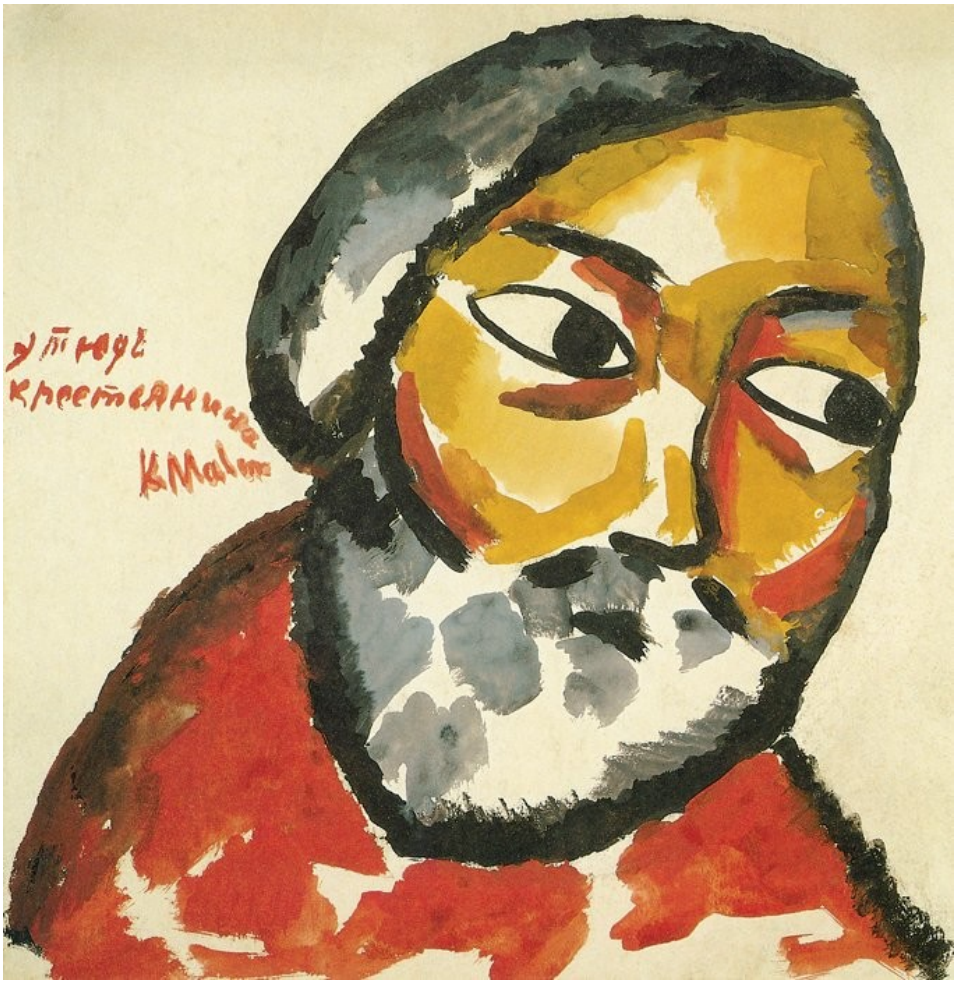
bewitched me was of a girl who sat on a bench and cleaned a potato. I was astounded with the plausibility of the potato and peelings which, like ribbons, lay on the bench near an excellently painted pot. This picture was real revelation for me, so I remembered it for a long time. The style of the expression powerfully disturbed me.

The potatoes and peelings looked so natural that this made a lasting impression, as did nature itself….So I was able to stay in Kiev where, I learned later, there were such 'great' artists as Pymonenko, and Murashko. "

Kiev forever left its imprint in Malevich's mind: the hills, the Dnieper River and its houses constructed of coloured bricks, the distant horizon and the bustle of steamships and dockside activity. He loved to watch the village women who came to town in small boats to sell their butter, milk and sour cream. These colourfully dressed peasants were everywhere along the river banks and streets of Kiev and gave to the city its special atmosphere.

"My father did not like me being keen on art," Malevich wrote. "He knew that there were many artists around painting pictures, but never talked on this theme. He nevertheless expected that I would follow his way in life. Father told me that an artist's life is really bad and many of them are in prisons. He didn't want that lifestyle for his own son. My mother had mastered different embroidery styles and the weaving of laces. She taught me and I learned to embroider and knit with a hook."

Woman Ironing, c. 1906-1907.
Oil on cardboard, 28.8 x 18.5 cm. Private Collection.



Peasant Head, end of 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 26.7 x 32 cm.
Musée national d'Art moderne,
centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

Argentine Polka, 1911. Gouache on cardboard, 117 x 70.5 cm. Private Collection.

The Chiropodist, 1911-1912.
Gouache on cardboard, 77.7 x 103 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Peasant Woman with Buckets and Child I,
end of 1911-beginning of 1912. Oil on canvas,
73 x 73 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Earliest Art Student Days

Kasimir began his first formal art lessons at the Kiev Drawing School, studying under Mykola Pymonenko. To experience a complete foundation in the manipulation of paint and the effect of light on surfaces, Malevich could not have begun his career with a more capable painter.

In his mid-thirties, Pymonenko was at the prime of his realist skills.

His seven hundred renditions of peasant life in the Ukraine were in keeping with the prevailing tastes of the time. He began his studies at the Kiev Drawing School at the age of sixteen, was accepted by the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts and then came back to teach at both the Kiev Drawing and Art Schools from 1882 to 1906. In 1909 he was elected a member of the Paris International Association of Arts and Literature and his work hangs in the Louvre as well as illustrating many of Taras Shevchenko's published poems.

An even greater impression on young Kasimir had to be the work of Oleksander Murashko, an Impressionist painter who also both studied and taught at the Kiev Drawing and Art Schools as well as opening is own studio to students. Murashko's style evolved from the realism of the Peredvizhniki School into a vivid, colourful Impressionism.

"Peredvizhniki" (Wanderers) was a name applied to members of the Russian Society of Itinerant Art Exhibitions. Ivan Kramskoi, Nikolai Ge, and thirteen other artists who had left the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts in protest against its rigid neo-classical dictates founded the society in 1870. In order to reach the widest audience possible, the society organized regular travelling exhibitions throughout the Russian Empire, including Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa in their tours. Murashko's work was more widely exhibited than Pymonenko's, appearing in Paris, Amsterdam and Munich, and there were one-man shows in Berlin, Cologne and Düsseldorf. [5]He was a co-founder of the Ukrainian State Academy of Arts in 1917 and served there as a professor and rector.

Kasimir's exposure to these academic realist and Impressionist painters with their genre subject matter set him on a path that, though it would eventually veer away from realism and objectivity, remained true to its peasant roots. He began to learn the intricacies of oil and gouache painting. Gouache is a painting medium usually executed on paper that became popular in the mid-nineteenth century and is similar to watercolour, but heavier and more opaque because a gum substance is added to the mixture of ground pigment and water. Gradually, he set himself the goal of attending a Moscow art school to expand his understanding of artistic expression. Towards that end, with his family settled in Kursk, he took a job as a draughtsman in the same railway office as his father. At about this time, he married Kazimira Zgletta, who would become a doctor.

[5] *Encyclopaedia of the Ukraine*, http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/art.asp#Topic_3

Peasant Women in Church, end of 1911-beginning of 1912.
Oil on canvas, 75 x 97.5 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

While he lived with his family and then started one of his own, Kasimir was closest to his mother who encouraged his artwork. Throughout his life. he came to her for encouragement and criticism. His father, on the other hand, was critical of his choice of art for a career. But even as his father pushed Kasimir toward more practical application of his drawing talents, he still found time to sketch with the boy.

When his father died in 1904, Malevich took the train to Moscow with the idea of entering the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. Because of poor academic grades, he failed to be accepted many times between 1905 and 1907 and finally returned to Kursk to continue painting in a neo-Impressionist style. On top of his striving to become a full-time artist, Kasimir had to cope with the 1905 Revolution.

On 22 January 1905 a priest led a crowd of workers to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to petition Czar Nicholas II. To quell the

disorder, troops fired on the crowd, killing many and achieving the predictable result of bloody strikes, savage riots, assassinations, naval mutinies and peasants rushing about in blind fury. At about this same time, the Russian Army was being badly beaten by the Japanese, displaying to the world the corruption and disorganization of the Russian Officer Corps. Out of this hellish turmoil came a manifesto from the Czar granting the establishment of the Russian *Duma* – an elected representative body – civil liberties and the appearance of democracy. Not satisfied with half a loaf, the Duma split into the Octoberist Party, who went along with the Czarist manifesto, and the opposing Constitutional Democratic Party, who formed a workers' council to compel adoption of reforms. Once again, to prevent disorder, Czarist troops arrested or shot everyone in sight who embraced the workers' council.

Kasimir, meanwhile, was trying to feed himself, keep a roof over his head and live in a dry place where he could set up his easel. Malevich wrote in his 1918 biography, describing his grim lifestyle:

"The commune was, beyond any doubt, a hungry bohemia. I looked like a true villager with my appetite, but it was unnecessary for me to buy bacon and garlic daily. The commune collected money for broth bones and artist Ivan Bokhan went to buy them. Butchers asked him, 'For dogs or for people?' and it embarrassed him very much. The broth was cooked often. Sometimes the commune ate in a canteen at school. The dinner was not expensive, only twelve kopeks for buckwheat porridge with butter or beef fat and borscht with meat.

In such conditions I worked. It was impossible to say that was easy, but nevertheless I worked. I dreamed about holding out till spring and then going to Kursk to earn some money again for autumn, painting sketches all summer long, and eating like a human being."

Outside the closed world of the school and commune, blood and thunder raged up and down the streets as troops hunted down strikers and other malcontents. The artists found themselves having to take measures to survive the depredations. Malevich described the situation:

"The Revolution of 1905 happened. There were disturbances on the streets. I stood at my easel and continued to paint. The pressure rose. Fedociya (a cook) was our main informer. She informed us of any events from a group of the "Black Hundred". (*Author's note:* According to Lenin, the *Black Hundreds* championed the preservation and formal restoration of autocracy under the sceptre of their adored monarch. Their determination to defend the present Czar's government at all costs very

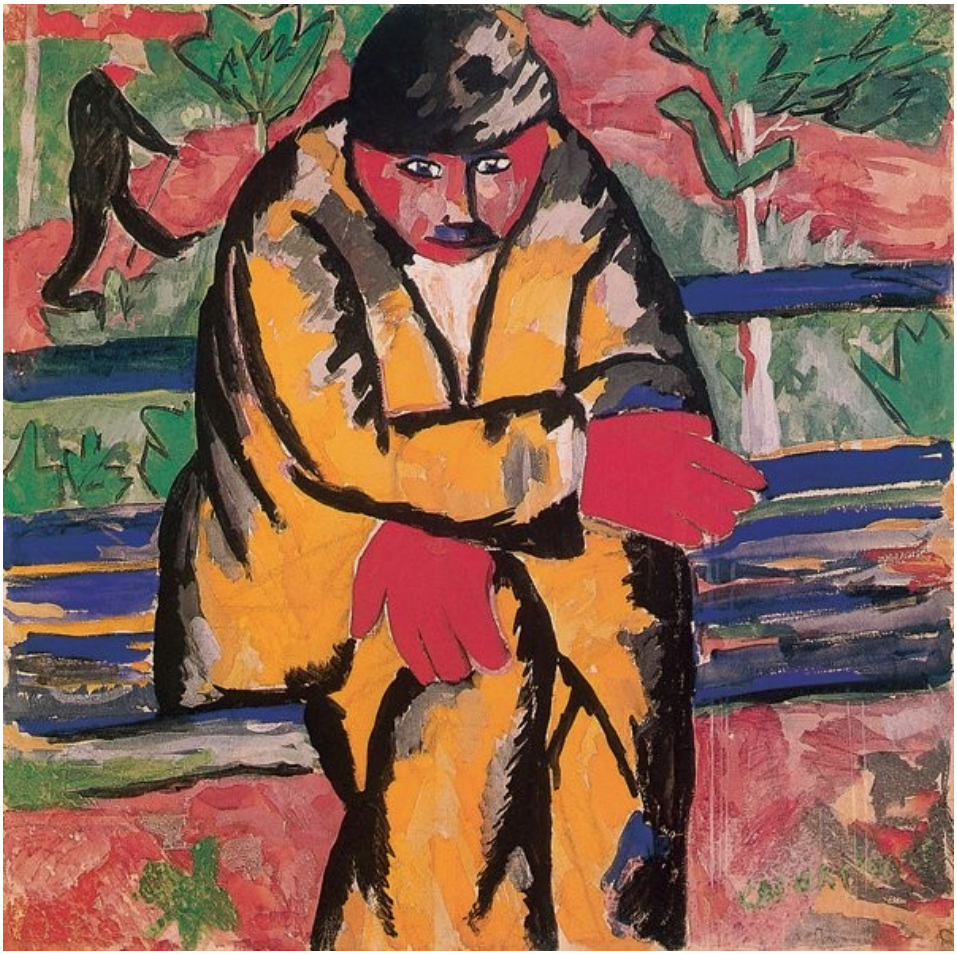
often united them with the Octoberists.)[6]

[6] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965.

Province, 1911. Gouache on cardboard,
70.5 x 70.5 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Man Carrying a Bag, 1910-1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 88 x 71 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

The Gardener, 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 91 x 70 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



On the Boulevard, 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 72 x 71 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

"A students' dormitory in an Engineering Technical School was located near our commune. Fedociya had connections with the dormitory (a janitor) and the nearest neighbourhood janitors who informed her secretly about any horrific preparations by the Black Hundred ('Tonight they will cut students, and could seize the commune too.'). We began some preparations: we dragged all plaster casts, a huge David and all Venuses, all benches and chairs and barricaded doors and windows. Then we moved to the upper floor and blocked a passageway

on top. The owner of the house, artist Kurdyumov, showed us the secret passageway through which it was possible to pass, in case of attack, from one house to another and then down to the street (the house of the commune was located in a courtyard).

My behaviour began to irritate one member of the commune, the artist Antonov. A nice guy, he scolded at me that I painted while it was necessary to go out onto the streets. He was thin and really tall (because of his height he had no room to swing when he took an axe). Blaming me, he sat on a floor with his legs tucked under himself, drank vodka and nibbled a broth bone which was all cartilage and tendons. Brandishing this bone, he forced me to go onto the streets.

The pressure rose. One evening we did not turn the lights on. Another student appeared among us and I got acquainted with him. That was Cyril Shutko and he informed us about the course of the revolution. I went to the city on Tver Street. At Leontyevsky Lane I was surrounded by members of the Black Hundred. I was dressed in a hat, a coat with a collar, and a black shirt; I had long hair.

'Wait, a socialist!' one of them called out, and some Finnish knifes flashed. I calmly asked, 'Do you have a cigarette?'

Then I immediately scolded them with a familiar profanity. One gave me a cigarette. I took it and put in my mouth and searching for a match, scolded them more and walked away. (I did not smoke at all).

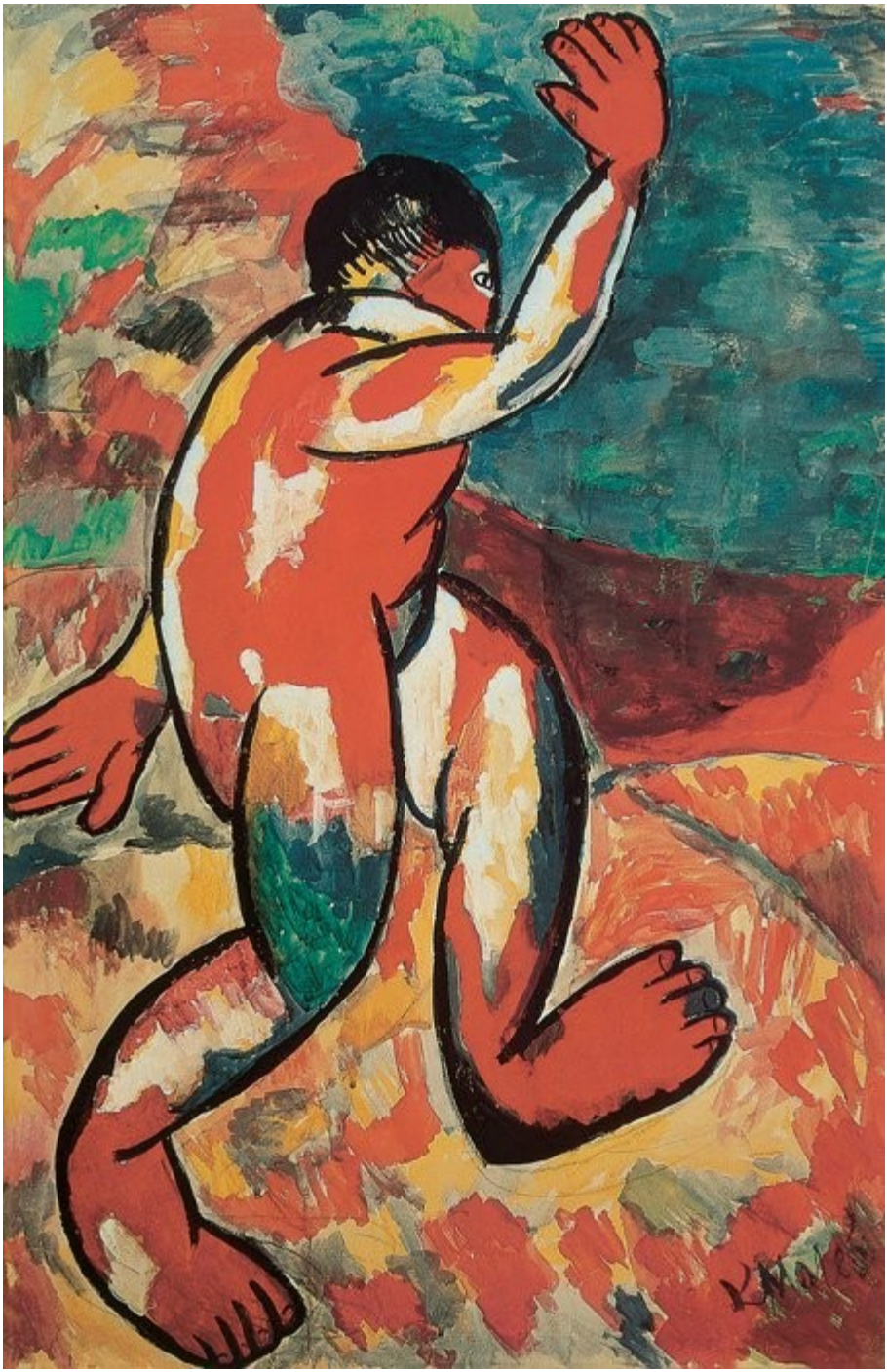
Then I returned to Lefortovo, to the commune. That was a very disturbing night; we could clearly hear shots. Fights began in the morning. Many members of the commune disappeared. Antonov quarrelled with me, took an axe with which he practised before preparing for a fight and went onto a street. He took a cab and ordered the driver to drive him to the Red Gate (on the barricades). We found out later that the police arrested him in a nearby lane.

I got a "bulldog" (a British Webley, five chamber, break-top revolver, two -inch barrel, 450 calibre) and bullets. This was a true war. I joined a group who had pockets full of bullets and different types of revolvers. Some other "hunters" joined this group. We went to the Red Gate and there was a fight. Then we returned to the Sooharevskaya Tower. We, and some other members of this group, were placed at Sretenskoj Street for observation. Fences cracked and we began to pile up a barricade. The evening came soon. We noticed that soldiers had moved across Sretenka. The soldiers quickly approached. A command was heard and the soldiers presented their guns at the ready. We spread the word along the barricade. In a moment a silent command spread at

our side and we fired.

Even though the soldiers were prepared, they did not expect such impudence. We shot at them over and over again. I quickly finished all five bullets in my revolver. It was not necessary to reload it. The soldiers found us out and began to shoot at us from passageways. Despite their firing, the bullets didn't hurt anybody at our post, only plaster was strewed about. We retreated to the barricades, but the soldiers, drawing up into an extended line, continued to shoot at us. We answered them eagerly; bullets whistled around. After each volley from their side, I, for some reason, wanted to jump up, as though bullets could fly at legs.

The Floor Polishers, 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 77.7 x 71 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



The Bather, 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 105 x 69 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

The skirmish was short because many of us scattered in different directions. Now, there were some wounded and dead men everywhere. Our group, while firing back, retreated to the courtyard of a house. After that, we closed a gate, took a ladder in the courtyard and started to climb over a fence to the courtyard of a neighbouring house. Our barricade was occupied by soldiers, but our group, almost all of us, passed through another courtyard and made a decision to go to Sretenka and the rear of the solders. In a minute, they entered the courtyard. Those who didn't have time to climb over the fence rushed away. I entered into the first porch of the house with the idea of getting up onto the roof and then climbing down a drainpipe to the street.

When I reached the third floor, I read a door card with one of my friends' names on it. But what should I do? Knock on the door or search for the attic? I decided to search for the attic, but it seemed that there was none. I stood on the stairs and listened to hear if somebody was coming. I counted my remaining bullets – there were five or six. Finally, I decided to knock. The door opened.

'Is that you?' my friend asked. 'How did you manage to come through? Do you have a revolver?'

'Yes, I have,' I answered.

'That is really bad, there'll soon be a search. OK, undress and put the revolver under the rug in the hallway at the threshold. Take off your coat and shirt and put on a vest.'

I obeyed; there was no time to quibble. He took off his jacket too and remained in a vest. Then, he got tobacco and lit it up. It was done on purpose to have plenty of smoke. The impression was made that we had been sitting all day long smoking and drinking. He brought out vodka, sausages, and cucumber.

I drank; it went well, and soon I was "up to heels" - I was hungry and in cases like this vodka always goes "up to heels" and a person becomes drunk quickly. My friend started singing and I joined him.

'Sing at the top of your voice!' he shouted.

Then came a knock at the door. He said loudly from his place, 'Enter!' A corporal with a revolver in his hand and two soldiers entered.

'Are any runaways in here?' the corporal asked.

‘What runaway? Would you like to have a glass of vodka? It’s my birthday today, so my friend and I, you know …’

At once the corporal changed his anger to goodwill, drank and asked for more. My friend had to pour another glass for him. I sat, having stretched on a chair, mumbled a song and gesticulated slightly.

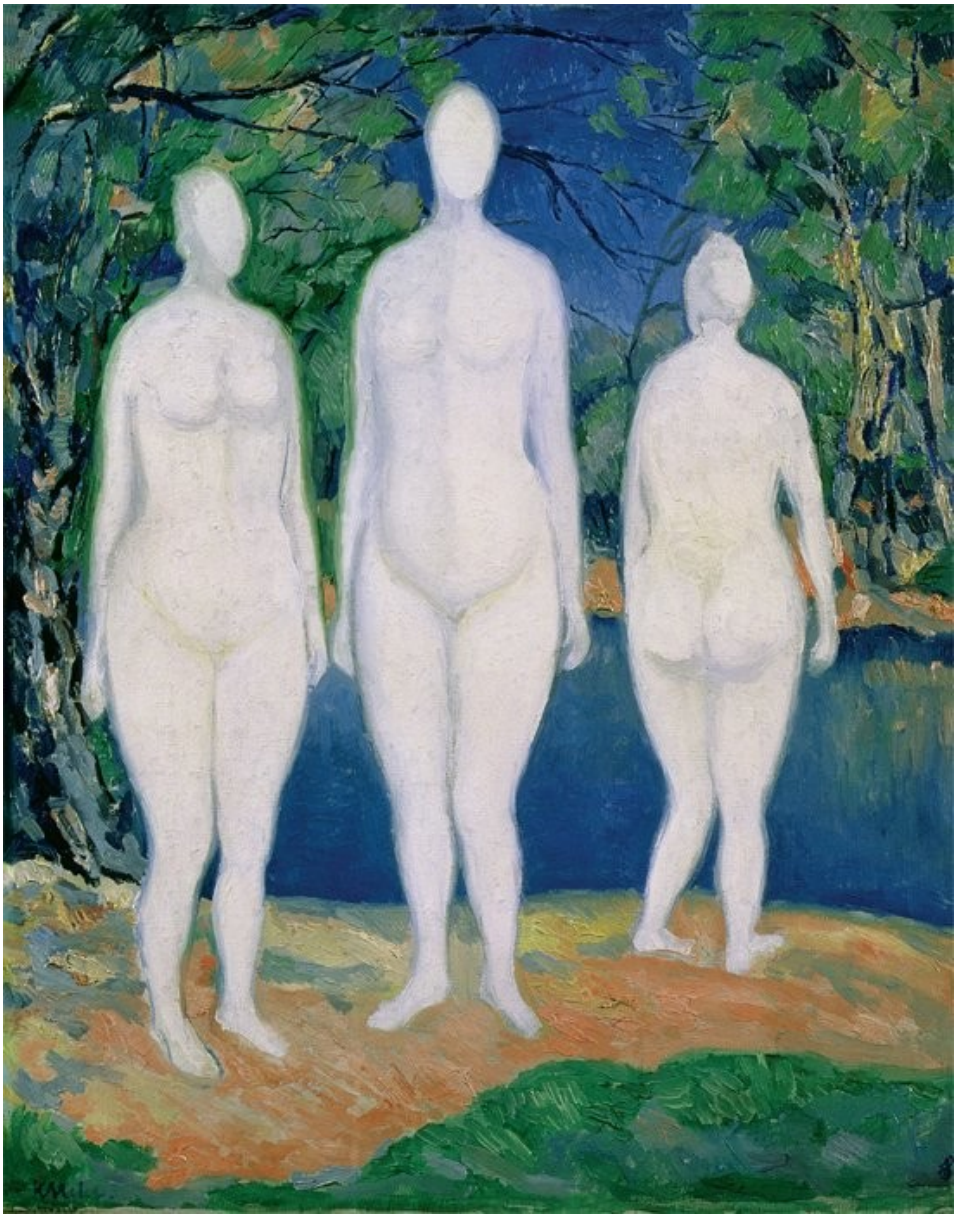
‘You see?’ my friend explained, ‘He got drunk...’

The corporal was not worried at all; everything was all right. He wiped his lips and, leaving, shouted to the soldiers, ‘To the exit!’

So we held this pose all night long, expecting more visitors.

In the morning, I followed a young girl who went to a shop carrying a basket. We left the courtyard without any problems.”

Malevich continually commuted to Moscow but also spent time to studying icons, and in 1906 he joined Fedor Rerberg’s studio, taking lessons in painting through to 1910.



Three Bathers, motif: c. 1910, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 59 x 48 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Bather Seen from Behind, 1911.
Gouache on cardboard, 48.4 x 47.8 cm. Private Collection.

He wrote: “Moscow icons turned over all my theories and brought me to my third stage of development. Through icon painting, I began to understand the emotional art of peasants, which I had loved before, but the meaning of which I could not grasp until I studied the icons.” These Moscow years had a double value for Malevich, allowing him to study both the deeper meanings of his beloved icons and learning new painting techniques and principles.

Rerberg was one of those multi-faceted teachers who, though he preferred to work in the Impressionist manner, did not force that style

on his students. His primary claim to fame was preparing students to enter the Moscow College. While Malevich failed to take advantage of this preparation, his studies with Rerberg between 1905 and 1910 grounded him in composition and colour. Rerberg was a master technician and wrote books about the chemical content of various brands of oil paint. Together with a deep appreciation of physiology and psychology, he pressured his students to translate technical facility into the expression of their own feelings.

In effect Fedor Rerberg was Malevich's only real intellectually-based teacher other than the osmosis derived from working alongside and being exposed to the works of beginners like himself and academic masters such as Pymonenko. From Rerberg, however, Kasimir received one unique gift, the chance to exhibit his work. In 1907 he exhibited two sketches at the 14th "Exhibition of the Moscow Community of ". He participated in the 15th and 16th Exhibitions, as well, before moving on.

Personally, this period covering the first ten years of the new century was unsettling for Malevich. With his father's death he became responsible for his mother and younger siblings. Combining his failure to gain a place in the Moscow College with the insecurity of his teetering self-confidence forced him into direct action to ease the pressure. To maintain connection with the core of the fine art movements, he moved his mother and family to Moscow while he commuted back to Kursk in the summers to work and paint. The strain on his marriage caused him to divorce his first wife and marry Sofia Mikhailovna Rafalovich. She was the daughter of a psychiatrist and wrote children's stories.

To keep the wolf from the door, Malevich and his new bride lived with other poor artists in a commune where everyone chipped in and shared chores. He took commercial art jobs and one in particular, sketches for publication of a controversial symbolist play, *Anathema* by Leonid Andreev, launched him among the "shock troops" of the avant-garde Moscow art movement. The Moscow Art Theatre that mounted the production gathered his lithographs into a rather elegant portfolio featuring scenes from the play and portraits of the actors in costume.

Malevich did not take this brief immersion in the maudlin excesses of Russian Symbolist poetry and theatre very seriously, but the vitality of the reaction to their productions must have excited him. An even greater influence on his work at this time was colliding with some of the best of French and other European Impressionism and Post-

Impressionism. Because Reberg was one of the founders of the Moscow Artists Society, Malevich was able to exhibit in the twice yearly shows beginning in 1907. Over time he was able to ingratiate himself with a virtual “who’s who” of the emerging Russian avant-garde.

The new stars included Natalia Goncharova, David Burliuk, Alexander Shevechenko, Mikhail Larionov and Alexei Morgunov. Towering over them was the eminence of Vassily Kandinsky. Malevich found himself swept up into the enthusiasm of Goncharova and Larionov and joined them in exploring a post-Impressionist style in 1909.

Goncharova was born in Nagaevo village near Tula, Russia, in 1881. She studied sculpture at the Moscow Academy of Art, but turned to painting in 1904. Like Kasimir, she was deeply inspired by the primitive aspects of Russian folk art and attempted to emulate it in her own work while incorporating elements of Fauvism and Cubism.

Reaper II, 1912.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 69.4 cm.
Art Gallery of Astrakhan, Astrakhan.

Reaper II, motif: c. 1910-1911, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 74.2 x 72 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Reapers/Rye Harvest, 1912.
Oil on canvas, 74.2 x 72 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

The Mower I, end of 1911-beginning of 1912. Oil on canvas, 113.5 x 66.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts of Nijni Novgorod, Nijni Novgorod.

From 1902 Larionov's style was Impressionism. After a visit to Paris in 1906 he moved into post-Impressionism and then a neo-Primitive style which derived partly from Russian sign painting. In 1908 he staged the *Golden Fleece* exhibition in Moscow, which included paintings by international avant-garde artists such as Matisse, Derain, Braque, Gauguin and Van Gogh. Other group shows promoted by him included Tatlin, Marc Chagall and the emerging Kasimir Malevich.

Larionov helped found two important Russian artistic groups, the *Jack of Diamonds* (1909–1911) which included Malevich in its exhibitions, and – with Gonchorova – the radical-chic *Donkey's Tail*. This latter group was conceived to create a break from European art influence and to establish an independent Russian school of modern art. Though Goncharova had been involved with icon painting and primitive Russian folk-art, Futurism became the focus of her later paintings. She achieved fame in Russia for her work such as the Futurist *Cyclist* and her later Rayonist works. In 1913 Larionov created Rayonism, which was the first attempt at near-abstract art in Russia. The *Donkey's Tail* group led the Moscow Futurists and organized *outré* lecture evenings in the fashion of their eccentric Italian counterparts.

Impressionism and Experimentation

At this point in his career, Kasimir Malevich was an open vessel, seeking a style that he could embrace. He participated in the second exhibition of the group *Soyus Molod'ozhi* (*Union of Youth*) in St. Petersburg in 1911 with some success.

Besides his Russian and Ukrainian contemporaries, Malevich had access to one of the great collections of Western contemporary art assembled by Sergei Shchukin. The heir to a very wealthy textile manufacturer and director of two textile plants, Shchukin had the capital to invest in art. Beginning in the 1890s, he carved a swathe through the Paris galleries, crating and shipping works of Renoir, Pissarro, Monet and continued into the new century with purchases of Van Gogh and Gauguin. The early canvasses of Cézanne were plucked

off the walls and from gallery racks before most of the art world had recognized the Frenchman's genius. Alongside 21 Cézanne works that found appreciation in Shchukin's mansion, between 1909 and 1913, thirty-five Picassos were purchased, beginning with his painting *Lady With a Fan*.

If any Western painter besides Cézanne was lionized in the East, it was Paul Gauguin. The June 1909 issue of the art newsletter, *Zolotoe Runo* (The Golden Fleece) displayed ten pages of Gauguin's wood reliefs and sculpture taken mostly from the Paris collection of Gustav Feyet. This publication, a fine arts journal, was begun in 1906 and documented both the traditional and avant garde inside and outside Russia.

The relative isolation of Eastern artists was eased quite a bit by these publications and private collections – especially in the case of Shchukin who opened his mansion to the public (and particularly to artists) to see and sketch the works. [7]

Malevich's exposure to Gauguin and Cezanne over the first decade of the twentieth century is not difficult to trace in his peasant sketches and paintings. His pencil sketches for *Women at Church* (1911) have a Gauguinesque quality in their repetitive images and ritual gestures in a single picture plane and the mask-like treatment of the babushka-wrapped faces. In rendering them as masks, he draws on his icon studies wherein the faces that looked down on peasant life from the sacred paintings were not divine faces, but were the transfigured images of ordinary people. By the time the sketches reached their oil painted result, the crowded canvas, subdued colours and heavily outlined colour shapes bring in the influence of Cezanne's pre-Cubist predictions.

[7] Charlotte Douglas, *Malevich*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., NYC, 1994, p. 10-11.

The Woodcutter II, end of 1912.
Oil on canvas, 94 x 71.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Morning in the Village after Snowstorm,
end of 1912-beginning of 1913.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 79.5 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Woman with Pails: Dynamic Arrangement,
autumn 1912. Oil on canvas, 80.3 x 80.3 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Perfected Portrait of Ivan Vassilievitch Kliun (Kliunkov), spring 1913. Oil on canvas, 112 x 70 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The painting accompanied twenty-four other Fauvist and Primitivist works to the *Donkey's Tail* exhibition and now Kasimir hung with the likes of Chagall and Vladimir Tatlin.

At last he had arrived at the centre of the scruffy gaggle of superheated painters, poets, sculptors, playwrights and intellectual ideologues who comprised the virtually-anything-goes Russian avant-garde. While there was trouble keeping borscht on the table, he must have been very happy. He wrote in his 1918 autobiography:

"Again, I returned to Kursk and continued Impressionism. I loved the nature of spring very much, April and the beginning of May. I did not go on sketches anymore and worked in an apple-tree garden near a small house that I rented for twelve roubles a month. This garden was my true studio now.

Kvachevsky, my best friend, came and severely criticized me. He could not tolerate my blue tones, but, eventually, I overcame him. His colour spectrum changed towards Impressionism and he drew very good sketches. His works are now collected in the Kursk museum. *Yasnaya Polyana* (A Serene Clearing) is his best drawing; it could be shown at any capital exhibitions.

In my workshop-garden I continued to work in Impressionism. I realized that the real idea of Impressionism is not to paint nature or subjects as close to reality as possible. But, the point of Impressionism contained in pure scenic texture, in the pure attitude of all my energy to the natural phenomena, to the only one of their picturesque quality which they carried or contained. All my creative works were similar to work of a weaver, who weaved a surprising texture of a pure fabric. I did it with only the difference that I formed this pure lovely fabric and it was readily apparent from my emotional needs and picturesque qualities, and not from anything else – (the pure act of expression). I learned that for an artist the main agitation always is the picturesque (painterly) superiority. This is his pure culture and the rest is not so important; this is something that others suggest him to arrange. For example, the theme which has the purpose, let's say, to express a psychology of a posing person by picturesque resources (painting an image of the person), illustrates the philosophy of world outlook,

anecdotes of life, heroism of the nation.

I divided these two sides of art and determined that picturesque art, in general, consists two parts. One part is pure – as such picturesque pure formation, another part is made of a subject theme, named a substance. Together they form art eclectically – a hybrid of painting with elements not belonging to the field of painting. For me, the reality became not that phenomenon which needs to be reproduced with accuracy, but the phenomenon of picturesque (painting). Therefore, all other qualities of a subject did not play a top role and so far were brought to light as their contours absolutely couldn't process picturesque (painted) creativity into a form. Working on Impressionism, I learned that the subject image has never been a major point of Impressionism. It still kept its likeness only because the artist did not know that form yet. The form which would represent painting "as such". The form which would not cause association with nature and subjects, would speak nothing about truth of subjects or about illusions, would not be an illustration or a story, but would be absolutely a new artistic fact, the new reality, and new truth.

Impressionism led me to a new vision of nature with new eyes. It caused my new reactions and ignited my spiritual energy to create and work on an absolutely different side of an occurrence.

Analyzing my own behaviour, I have noticed that, as a matter of fact, there was a work on liberation of a picturesque (painted) element from contours of natural phenomena and cleared my picturesque mentality from imposition of a subject. At the same time, another idea came to my mind, another feeling which was frightened by this kind of painting and asked on what form, free of subject contours, would have to be placed and whether it is possible to find such a form?

Previous schools and the *Peredvizhniki* of which I have been enamoured did so. They selected a proper theme: Polenov's *Christ and the Sinner*, Repin's *Revival of Iaira's Daughter*, and Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son* did the same thing. However, those masters put a theme to the main contents, which needed to be expressed, *by painting*. I come to another direction. *I did not wish to make painting as a method, but only a self-expression*. Ge (*Author's note*: in Italy during the 1860s the Russian painter of historical and scriptural themes, Nikolai Nikolayevich Ge, produced sketches with loose, expressive brushwork sometimes resembling Cézanne's.[8]) in his *Crucifixion* expressed feeling of his painting; he put it into his own theme. In his *Last Supper* he expressed a light effect for which he used Judas's body. This figure became a way

for achievement of the light effect.

In this picture I saw different attitude; I saw that it is also possible to formulate a theme to a means. As a matter of fact, Ge, as well as some other artists, lived with feelings of pure painting, but they could not imagine an existence of painting as it is. *They lived with objectless feelings, but created subject things.* I found myself in this position too; it seemed to me that painting in its pure form is, say, empty and that it is necessary to enclose some meanings into this form. On the other hand, the emotional storm of my painting feeling did not allow me to see images in their subject order, particularly if the theme had no picturesque origin. Naturalization of subjects did not stand up to criticism for me.

I have started to search for other opportunities, not outside but inside an interior of picturesque feeling. I expected that painting itself sooner or later will give a form that comes from picturesque qualities and will avoid electric connection with a subject, without illustrative associations. *This idea led me further and further away from an academic studying of nature, from naturalization and illusion*.

My familiarity with the art of icons convinced me that the *thing* is not in studying an anatomy and a perspective, not in reproduction of nature in its truth, but the *thing* is in sensing art and an art realism. In other words, I saw that realism or a theme is what is necessary to reshape an ideal form what originated from aesthetic depth. Therefore, everything can be beautiful in art. Something that is not so good-looking and realized in the artistic plan of the art becomes admirable."[9]

"…the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow Roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see a blue center light pop and everybody goes 'Awww!'"

Jack Kerouac

On the Road

[8] Nikolai Nikolayevich Ge, www.britannica.com

[9] Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World – the Manifesto of Suprematism*, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, 2003.

The Knife Grinder
(Principle of Glittering), winter 1912-1913.
Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 79.5 cm.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

Lady at Piano, spring 1914.
Oil on canvas, 66 x 44 cm. Regional Art Gallery of Kuban, Krasnojarsk.

Lackey with Samovar, beginning of 1914.
Oil on canvas, 70 x 53 cm. Private Collection.

Cow and Violon, 1913-1914.
Oil on wood, 48.8 x 25.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Fauves, Cubists and Futurists

A self-portrait painted in gouache on paper reveals the thirty-year-old Malevich in theatrical lighting imploring us with a severe stare to see him as a serious artist who happens to be standing in front of a backdrop of orange bathing nudes. While the painting shows his features, it also hints at the toll taken on his years of scuffing around on the bottom of the income ladder and the distance he has come from the carefree boy happily chewing on a chunk of garlic-rubbed, fatty bacon with a world of possibilities spread before him. His absorption into the art world resulted in being caught up in that ego-bruising, soul-draining quest to find a unique way to both stand apart from his peers and also be accepted by them as a serious practitioner.

Malevich stood at his easel in Kiev in the heart of roiling politics and ideologies as the Russian liberal opposition enforced its domination on the Ukraine. It would be hard to imagine a more isolated position subjugated to political extinction from the Russian stew of revolutionary forces that had usurped the core of divine power from the Czar. Monstrous bureaucratic wheels had been grinding away since the Czar had been forced into a constitutional monarchy in 1906. The status quo crumbled. Ideological windbags drew crowds to every street corner. Intellectuals and creative souls with even the slightest grasp of the shape of things to come were in a panic. Europe was hardly a haven for the technologically backward and ideologically crippled Ukrainians, Russians, Poles and Slavs seeking asylum from the impending bloodbath of anarchy.

Europe of the early twentieth century was hurtling along propelled by diesel engines and electricity, by aeroplanes and automobiles, by dynamos and Zeppelins. The Edwardian Era eroded away as the *nouveau riche* bought seats in government and tin-pot duchies turned in their swords and pikes for Mauser rifles and Maxim machine guns. In 1900 there were about 3,000 automobiles put-putting about the French countryside. By 1907 there were 30,000 vehicles tearing up the cobbles, and when 1913 dawned, the French were building 45,000 cars a year.

Layaway credit buying became popular. Albert Einstein created his Special Theory of Relativity (1905), and the cinema conquered both time and space as moving picture theatres replaced burlesque houses. Blériot flew the English Channel in his single seat monoplane (1909) and the *Titanic* came and went during its first cruise (1912).

Competition for the art world spotlight was fierce. France was filling up with immigrants seeking some of the left-over glow remaining from the Impressionists. Pablo Picasso had just completed *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, arguably the world's most influential painting, and was moving on with his friend Georges Braque to invent Cubism.

But when it came to challenging the fortified stronghold of objective art, art based on nature, Vassily Kandinsky was the force to be reckoned with on the international stage. During this period just prior to the start of the 1914-18 War, his rejection of objective art had fully evolved, and a great deal of spluttering and fist-shaking took place wherever artists, collectors, critics and curators gathered.

The Russian-born artist was one of the first experimenters in pure abstraction in modern painting. His success in pursuing avant-garde exhibitions allowed him to found *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider; 1911-14) group in Munich and devoted himself totally to abstract painting. An accomplished musician, Kandinsky once said that colour was his keyboard: "…the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul." Kandinsky correlated colour based on parallel outcomes associated with music, such as tone equated with timbre (the sound's character), hue with pitch, and saturation with the volume of sound. He even claimed that when he saw colour he heard music.[10]

Kasimir Malevich worked his way through a period from 1909 to 1913 carving out figural compositions based on the solidity of Cézanne's best rough-hewn canvasses, Gauguin's heavy-handed symbolism and the fluidity of Matisse's line. With Goncharova and Larionov, he participated in the *Donkey's Tail* show in March 1912 which showcased a number of Malevich's Cezanne/Gauguin/Mattise-esque paintings in which he savoured his rural roots. Loosely-drawn peasants perform their homely jobs: filing toenails in a bath house or performing ablutions (bather splashing in a creek) and looking very un-French both in not following the rigidly prescribed rules of Cubism, or in luxuriating in the languorous pastimes of the *petit bourgeois*. His work explores the peasant icons that looked down on his childhood, but filtered through the genius

of his compounded style.

[10] Jacques Lassaigne, *Kandinsky,* The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, Ohio, 1964.

The Grand Hotel or Life in the Grand Hotel, 1913.
Oil on canvas, 108 x 71 cm.
Samara Art Museum, Samara.

Sewing Machine, 1913.
Oil on canvas, 74 x 59 cm. Private Collection.

Malevich's paintings during the 1911-1912 period began with slice-of-life subjects drawn from his observations. Though he thought of his

earlier works as Impressionist, the use of “Impression” related not to the palette or the use of light, as with the French works, but as related to the subject matter. These are narrative works, story-telling pictures, but sifted through his growing appreciation of symbolism overlaid upon the rituals of daily life. By this time he had also become accustomed to using photographs as models for his paintings. This had a very practical origin in that his days of roaming villages and towns with a sketch pad had become curtailed by the need to feed himself and his family.

Here again, the term “Impression” becomes a description of the photographer’s moment as re-interpreted into a painting on the easel.

An example of this interpretation is his Argentine Polka painted in gouache on paper in 1911. The man in his tuxedo and the woman in her white ball-gown are captured in mid-step as the moustachioed dandy guides his pliant partner with brisk footwork. The background, the dance floor, the swirling dancers are folded forward into the single picture plane and only hinted at with daubs of dashed-on colour. Having abandoned all attempts to reproduce nature, anatomy and perspective, Malevich uses shapes, bright colours and over-the-top poses to symbolize the rigid pomposity of the moment.

Carrying this “frozen moment” narrative a step farther would be The Floor Polishers (1911). Here, Malevich has turned a mundane act of scouring a floor into a tribal ballet. Through twisted bodies, elbows thrust out, hands folded on hips and legs bent, bare feet fastened to brushes slide across the grit-layered floor. These labourers become dancers, mouths agape as they use their weight and momentum to holystone a floor, ready for a bucket of water and fresh grit to begin polishing again. Even here he has folded forward the background, turning the surface into a two-dimensional pattern of colours. Gauguin’s green patina skin tones hint at monuments to ritual work, to a job preserved as art rather than drudgery.

A homage to Van Gogh is hinted at in the gouache-on-paper rendering, *Man With Sack* (1911). This anonymous study in a Fauve palette drives a man up a town hill beneath the burden of a heavy sack carried over his shoulder. He leans into the hill and his leg muscles bulge beneath peasant trousers as he slogs. His face is turned away. The large red right hand grips the neck of the sack, while the red left hand gestures, empty, from an unseen arm.

Whereas movement and dynamics drove *The Floor Polishers*, here the lone figure is virtually stagnant, but colours race around the composition. The street and building seem bathed in yellows and orange

puddles. Shapes are suggested with blue lines applied in the wet over the yellow to become an aqueous blue-green. Colours are overlaid on the labourer's black clothes as if the oranges and reds are sun reflections, but their opacity recalls the mud of Malevich's *Nevsky Prospekt*. Might this bent-over beast of burden reflect Malevich's own feeling of being weighed down with life as he struggled to find his own style? This work was first shown in Moscow at the *Donkey's Tail* Exhibition.

Of all his "homey" works depicting peasant life, one of the most revealing is *The Chiropodist at the Baths* (1911-1912). Its subject manages to be both humorous and sad at the same time, while revealing a bit of Russian life not usually paraded across art gallery walls. But the gouache has earned a place in art history for offending just about everybody. First, its compositional roots seem to lie in a traditional icon familiar to most Orthodox Russian Christians, the *Old Testament Trinity*. This often-reproduced icon depicts three angels seated around a table in the garden of Sarah and Abraham preparing to dine on a ritualistic meal which foretells the incarnation of Christ.[11]

[11] *Op. Cit.,* Charlotte Douglas, *Malevich*, p. 58.

Portrait of M.V. Matyushin, end of 1913.
Oil on canvas, 106.5 x 106.7 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Toilet Bag, spring 1914.
Oil on wood, 49 x 25.5 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Ghost Station, beginning of 1914.
Oil on wood, 49 x 25.5 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Samovar II, summer 1913.

Oil on canvas, 88 x 62 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Substituting two overweight, under-dressed Russians and a steam-bath foot-doctor for the three angels was bad enough, but the composition also veered very closely to an oil by Paul Cézanne, *The Card Players*. While Cézanne populates his painting with five players, they all crowd around a prominent foreground table. Seated at the table is a man who bends over his cards with rounded shoulders not unlike the pose of Malevich's steam-bath chiropodist over his client's needy foot. Other interpreters have likened the towels hung about the two bathers to angel wings and the window above the chiropodist's head to the picture frame above Cézanne's card player's head.

For all its supposed subtext and purported winks at religion (a favourite tweak of Malevich's) and the French master, Malevich manages to capture a very human moment that stands by itself. The bather on the left savours his tobacco, exhaling a long stream from his puff. The bather swathed in towels watches intently as the chiropodist snips at an offending toenail illuminated by a candle flame. The foot doctor, dressed in peasant clothes, grips the client's foot as he concentrates on the toe trimming, kneeling next to either his toolbox or a water bucket used to douse the coals. This is a well-seen moment regardless of its supposed lifted and heretic baggage. Malevich showed this work at the *Donkey's Tail* Exhibition in 1912.

Another of his neo-Primitive works – so-called not because of their style, but their subject matter – is Peasant Woman with Buckets and Child I (1911-1912). This work, an oil on canvas, struggles to be seen during a pitched battle between foreground and background. It seems as if Malevich had another painting in mind when he began this one, but as the two characters took shape, the busy objects to their rear threatened to overwhelm what had become the picture's riveting centrepiece. Positive and negative spaces in the rear are all jumbled and the yoke carrying the two buckets across the woman's shoulder vanishes, then reappears. The yellow slash that curves behind them contributes a streak of Futurist movement that is arrested by the solid oak figures with their large, rooted feet.

These people are Slav peasant stock with what appear to be oval masks cut from somewhere else and pasted in place over the stolid bodies. The iconic, heavy-lidded faces betray a life of toil lived by the

older woman and a life of toil expected in the dull expression of the child as they plod home. The shading of their garments is subtle, anticipating the Futurist eruption that was looming as this figural phase of his art vanished in direct proportion to the increase in his vocabulary and the part abstract philosophies would begin to play in his life.

In 1912, he travelled from Moscow to St. Petersburg and became involved with the Russian Futurist group just in time to receive their first manifesto, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*. This testy harangue suggested in florid prose that Russian literary past masters should be "… thrown overboard from the steamer of the Present Time." Its writers included the poets Alexei Kruchenykh and Velimir Khlebnikov. These two poets engaged Malevich with their writings on the philosophical and theoretical aspects of art, specifically the concept of *zaum*.

Zaum postulated a world "beyond the mind state" where language and vision occur beyond the realm of conscious thought. The term was coined by Kruchenykh in 1913 and has been translated as "transreason" or "beyonsense". It is an experimental poetic language characterized by indeterminacy in meaning. As Kruchenykh has it, zaum is a transrational language, "wild, flaming, explosive (wild paradise, fiery languages, blazing coal)," which awakens creative imagination from the manacles of everyday speech. Zaum "can provide a universal poetic language, born organically, and not artificially like Esperanto."[12]

This special level of über-concsiousness can only be perceived by those enlightened persons – mostly artists – who have been favoured with a highly evolved level of perception.[13]

Like Malevich's painting, Kruchenykh's *zaum* writings were a hotchpotch of borrowed concepts including theosophy, Petr Demiianovich Uspensky's fourth dimension, Richard Maurice Bucke's cosmic consciousness and something familiar to Malevich's peasant days, *glossolalia*. This "speaking in tongues" – ecstatic unintelligible sounds while in the throes of religious rapture – was a part of some Russian Christian sects. *The Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament states that on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability."

[12] Alexei Kruchenykh, *Zaum,* treatise, 1921.

[13] *Op. Cit.,* Charlotte Douglas, *Malevich*.

Guard Officer, end of 1913-beginning of 1914.
Oil on canvas, 57 x 66.5 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Malevich had used his gift of artistic creation to peg himself above his immediate surroundings as a questioning observer. He had further cut his ties to realist or naturalist art dependent on subject matter. Now these new creatures, the philosophers, became like the three artists of Belopolya who had fascinated him at the age of eleven with their eccentric clothes and paint that came from tubes. The writings of these philosophers granted an even higher state of evolution beyond recognizable images to the embodiment of feelings. His violinist-composer friend Mikhail Matiushin, also a *zaum* believer, wrote:

"Artists have always been knights, poets and prophets of space in all eras. Sacrificing to everyone, dying, they were opening eyes and teaching the crowd to see the great beauty of the world concealed from it."

Malevich's attempt to "teach the crowd" and open eyes using the written word, as he had moved from grinding his own paints to squeezing a tube, had mixed success. Just as Lennike had taught that no less than fifty-four "bodily colours" were needed to paint a field of grass, the number of philosophers he attempted to absorb and abstract what appealed to him was hugely ambitious. His stringing together of theories and pronouncements developed by Russian and German intelligentsia of the period to clarify the understanding of his art often had the opposite effect.

He and his avant garde comrades were repeatedly dismissed by critics such as the Russian painter, stage designer, art historian, and critic, Alexandre Benois, who was also a leader of the World of Art group.

The World of Art was an artistic movement founded in 1898 by a group of students that included Alexandre Benois, Konstantin Somov, Dmitry Filosofov, Léon Bakst and Eugene Lansere. Its manifesto was a de facto art magazine that was a major influence on Russian art development. Benois and his colleagues were disgusted with the anti-aesthetic nature of modern industrial society and promoted understanding and conservation of traditional folk art and the eighteenth-century rococo. Exhibitions organized by the World of Art attracted many well-known artists from Russia and abroad.

Benois trod on one of Kasimir's 1915 exhibition pamphlets as "… not worth the paper it is printed on." He grouped Malevich's compatriots, wishing they would "…go away into a herd of swine and disappear into the depths of the sea." Hounding Malevich's repeated explanations, Benois excoriated the artist's 1922 paper, *God is Not cast Down* with "…some kind of pathological ventriloquy and degenerate madness by someone who imagines himself a prophet."[14]

Even critics and contemporaries who defended his art considered his writing to be gibberish, the stringing together of meaningless sentences. It is difficult to dispute this position considering the buffet of ideas from which he selected. Once exposed to the gymnastics of self-expression with the written word, Malevich reacted as he had obsessively pursued painting, compulsively devoured the succulent, salty and sweet-slick brain food of the intelligentsia and lived in their milieu despite his social separation from them. Quotes from collected thinkers bubble to the surface throughout this text, but their accumulation only serves to reveal Malevich's total creative commitment to his non-objective thrust into the mainstream.

[14] Jean-Claude Marcadé, *Malevich, Painting and Writing: On the Development of a Suprematist Philosophy*, Suprematism Catalog, Guggenheim Museum, 2003.

Lady in a Trolley, end of 1913-beginning of 1914.
Oil on canvas, 88 x 88 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Lamp/Instruments, end of 1913.
Oil on canvas, 83.5 x 69.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

That Malevich was able to boil up this pottage into a unique line of thought is defended by many of his contemporaries and eminent

authorities who came to his work later. Many painters felt the need to establish the grounding behind their vision with lines of text and just as many failed. The philosopher Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) who was both a medievalist and a popular writer on the history of philosophy wrote:

"Being a painter doesn't prevent the artist from also being a writer, but he won't be able to practise both at the same time. Real painters are well aware that they must choose between painting, writing and speaking."[15]

Malevich seemed to agree with this pronouncement when he stopped painting between 1920 and 1924. He also penned, "What a shame it is that I am not a writer. I don't like redoing and repeating what has already been written. It bores me to death! I write something else. But I write poorly. I'll probably never learn."

To this the critic Nikolai Khardzhiev replied, "The energy of his 'heavy style' is appreciated by few. Even one of Malevich's closest students, El Lissitzky, who translated his articles into German, thought that '…his grammar was completely the wrong way round.' And yet Malevich had the remarkable quality of being able to capture the process of living thought. He wrote with extraordinary speed and practically without any changes."[16]

Futurism, as introduced by the Italians, was seducing the young Russian painters. But as the Italians had Futurism throttled out of them by a less than adoring patronage, the Russians stuck their chins out and wallowed in its illusionist excesses. The Italians saw dynamic energy in modern life, especially in the machinery that both ruled society and was served by a widening class of machinery-dependent proletarians. The Russians fell upon this dichotomy and the worship of motion, steel and man-as-machine with considerable relish. And suddenly rising among the leaders was Kasimir Malevich. By 1912, he began his turn towards a world that existed in his mind rather than before his eyes.

Planted foursquare and peering out at the viewer, The Mower appeared in the late months of 1912 and signals a pronounced style shift. Malevich anchors his standing subject in the centre of the canvas, arms and legs spread as though waiting for something to happen. His clothes have a metallic sheen not unlike armour, but the shine from the surfaces recognizes no light direction from a single source such as the sun. Each segment of the peasant costume functions as a separate entity lit from a different direction and assembled. *The Mower* carries his symbolic tool, a scythe, at his side in his left hand. The blade, however, barely shimmers at all, and trails down from the wood handle like a

sagging banner. The face alone bears human touches, but even the eyes look out of slits in a bronze mask behind a tri-colour nose. The beard becomes a steel jaw, a hinged appendage clamped shut.

In the pencil sketch of *The Mower* a more realistic nod to the armoured knight emerges as the graphite pencil shades in more realistic frontal-lit sheen on the steel plate. The face is more helmet-like and less real. Also, the scythe hangs from the fingers of the right hand, sketched in with only curved lines.

It is the background that pushes the figure towards the viewer. While *The Mower* lives in cerulean monochrome shaded to white, the background is a toxic red and orange as though flower petals have been sealed in raspberry aspic. This strong Russian peasant was first hung at the Free Art Society in Moscow in the “Contemporary Painting” exhibit. The Visual Arts Section of the Commissariat of Public Education following the November Revolution later purchased it. *The Mower* found a permanent home in March 1920 on a wall of the Nizhni Novgorod Art Museum.

The Woodcutter, an oil on canvas painting of this same period, advanced Malevich further away from nature and into geometric shapes and colours that bind foreground and background into a single plane jumbled with a cacophony of tumbled cylinders. Amid this tangle of shapes, *The Woodcutter* is both separate from and part of the confusion. Possible interpretations of this painting are endless, considering Malevich’s state of mind and his reading list.

[15] Étienne Gilson, *Peinture et réalité*, Paris, Vrin, 1972, p. 290.

[16] Nikolai Khardzhiev, *Vmesto predisloviia*, Stockholm, Gileia, 1976, p. 101.

Head of a Peasant Girl, spring-summer 1913.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 95 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Composition with Mona Lisa, 1914-1915.
Oil on canvas, 62.5 x 49.3 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Lady at the Poster Column, 1914.
Oil and collage on canvas, 71 x 64 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

The reduction of the character and background to geometric shapes overlaid and simplified remove even more naturalistic content. Again, the surface lighting is random as are the colours and while the logs stacked up in the background cause the eye to flit around the canvas,

the upper torso offers some degree of orientation. Again, his tin man with iron jaw clamped shut creates an image of sturdy peasant stock. The upper torso, however, is truncated by the lower half of his garment which, because of the illumination seems more like a repetition of the axe blade.

If anything, *The Woodcutter* demonstrates Malevich's mastery of colour and surface to create movement. Regardless of the subject matter, the painting has a brilliant dynamism that will serve him well as he moves towards the heady possibilities of pure abstraction. As to its symbolism, the sky's the limit. The use of a woodcutter hacking his way through that heap of logs, leaving wood-chips behind, allows free play with his opinion of the Official Imperial Russian Art Establishment. Perhaps he sees Friedrich Nietzsche's *Untermensch* toiling mindlessly as he accepts his lot and serves only as cannon fodder for the political and Czarist *élite*.

Exhibited in Paris at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1914, the oil-on-canvas work painted in 1912-13 titled *Morning After a Storm in the Country*, was an obvious favourite of his. He showed it everywhere he could: the *Target* Exhibition in Moscow, the Polish Arts Club in Warsaw and the Great Berlin Art Exhibition. It was eventually acquired by the Guggenheim Museum in New York. On this canvas he demonstrates his ability to slide comfortably between the geometric shards of abstraction and naturalism.

Three figures populate a village with houses spouting smoke from their chimneys, a tree in the town square and rolling hills in the background. A heavy snowfall has blanketed the scene forcing the background figure to drag (wood for the stove?) in a sleigh with runners. In the foreground two characters lug water buckets toward the town well. It is a charming painting that tugs at his roots in nature and the days of his youth prowling the villages as "…the boy who always asked questions."

Were it not for the random lighting of roughed-in objects, the tilted and twisted geometry of the "town" and the figures made of "convex" trapezoids and triangles, *Morning after a Storm in the Country* would be a pleasant genre scene worthy of the Academy. It stands now as a precursor to Malevich's plunge into Cubism.

Good-bye Neo-Primitivism, hello Cubo-Futurism might be a better title than the Woman with Water Pails, Dynamic Arrangement. A pencil sketch exists that tips off the viewer to Malevich's central character before the final oil interpretation. No longer transitioning, this work

drops the artist straight into the Cubist realm – despite its busy Futurist overtones. Besides the tin buckets hanging from their yoke, the array of convex triangles and other tin-like shards that comprise the pail-lady add to the painting's clank and clatter. Jabs of colour dart among the large central shapes like knife-edge blasts of sound not unlike the shriek of pagan rituals depicted in Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* that had its riotous debut in 1913. *Woman with Water Pails* is a noisy painting. In the cluster of small shapes occupying the upper right corner, a trapezoidal figure is glimpsed escaping the cacophonous scene toward a tilted house. No one can blame him.

Malevich called the picture one of his "Zaum Realism" works that existed "beyond the human intellect."

АПТЕ
К

Aviator, autumn 1914.
Oil on canvas, 125 x 65 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

ЗА
ТМЕНІЕ
СКАКОВОЕ
ОБЩЕСТВО
ЧАСТИЧ
НОЕ

Englishman in Moscow, autumn 1914.
Oil on canvas, 88 x 57 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Following up on a more conventional portrait of his friend and sculptor, Ivan Kliun, Malevich further pursued his "Zaum" adventure with Perfected Portrait of Ivan Vassilievitch Kliun (Kliunkov). This full face Cubist rendering employs both symbolism and references to the "inner eye" philosophy that was driving the artist's exploration of inner-directed inspiration.

Above Malevich's rolled steel jaw – as with *The Mower* – clamped shut beneath a tri-colour nose Kliun's right eye is cleft and the two halves offset. This has been interpreted as producing the "inner eye" from which the creative flow is directed. On the left side of the nose the eye has become faceted into multiple prisms. Intruding into the canvas from the left and right are saw blades that might symbolize Kliun's sculpture work with wood. Here, the use of colour segments amid the burnished monochromatic metallic shards is less sharp and more in harmony with the composition than the piercing jabs of *Woman with Water Pails*.

In November 1913, the work was shown in the Union of Youth Exhibition held in St. Petersburg with the *Woman with Water Pails*. Malevich then whisked it off to Paris and the *Salon de Indépendants*. Eventually, the Russian government purchased the painting in 1919. As late as *Perfected Portrait of Ivan Vassilievitch Kliun (Kliunkov)* being show as part of the "New Trends in Art" at the Russian Museum.

Kasimir Malevich never made much money from his painting. At one time, in the autumn of 1913, he managed a boarding house where he cleaned the rooms and doled out bowls of borscht and sour bread to the homeless and underemployed – to whose ranks he belonged. Since painting has considerably higher overheads than writing, a steady income earned as a landlord's male skivvy was required to buy paint which he used in copious amounts as his fevered mind shoved him closer to the "freeing of his intellect" from the constraints of nature's demands.

Between cooking meals, he read reams of philosophical works and the endless manifestos penned by hopeful "-ism" and "-ist" artist groups. When he wasn't hauling loads of coal and wood, he managed to produce a series of paintings that advanced his figural studies still closer to

Expression and away from Impression.

With a brilliant *tour de force* in 1913 that seemed to come from nowhere, he launched a personal variant of a Cubism-Futurist mix that was as stunning in its virtuosity as it was surprising. The Knife Grinder (Principles of Flickering) sounds like a study for a textbook, but the painting's blend of simulated motion and Cubist multiple viewpoints and use of a steely palette and fractured facets, vaulted Malevich into the sophisticated eyrie of innovative creators of his time.

The fragmented multiple placements of hands and feet of the hunched -over knife grinder suggest busy Futurist subjects. Now, his colour and monochromatic geometric sections blend and reinforce each other. The result appears like a multiple exposure on a piece of film but using the painter's freedom to recast each element separately from its natural counterpart. Malevich is clearly in charge. He has driven this phase of his evolving vision to a comfortable mastery.

The painting's concept did not drop from the aether, however. Its existence owed much to the work of Ferdinand Leger, who had merged French sensibilities with the hard surfaces and crystalline fragments of Italian Futurism, specifically in the painting *Woman in Blue*, created in 1912.

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, “Podgy”, 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.2 x 21.2 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

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Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, “Ill-intentioned”, 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.3 x 21.3 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

К. Малевич 1913 г. Напряжение

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, “Enemy”, 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.2 x 21.3 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

8
IVx
Костюм Новый!

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, "New", 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 26 x 21 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

In the same year, Marcel Duchamp produced his famous *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, a virtual cinematic flip-book of action paraded diagonally across a canvas. The merger of these two works that had been hung in the same *Section d' Or* exhibition in Paris demonstrates Malevich's quick grasp of developing theories in kinship that, when stirred into his own mystic conceptions, produced a unique vision. And yet, as he drifted toward abstraction, he seemed to not trust his own developing genius and continued to look over his shoulder and into the studios of his contemporaries for inspiration; much as he had watched those Russian icon painters in his youth.

Even as he embraced Cubism, Malevich denied its theoretical underpinning. While Picasso and Braque used the fragmentation of objects and reassembling them in space to better understand the objects' subject matter and optical relationships to their whole, Malevich saw destruction. He saw each subject at the point of explosion, a scattering of components into independent matter, not a reordering but a severing of relationships.

The chill winds of autumn buffeted the streets of Sokolniki, the Moscow suburb where he came closer to the works of Braque and Picasso. He abandoned his burnished shards for rough textures, and his bright acidic colours for the muted umbers, blues and ochres of the French Cubist masters.

The painting Samovar II of 1913 was a huge departure from his kinetic *Knife Grinder* as a terracotta wall from a slab of polished marble. Different too is his use of the local colours of the samovar rather than inventing colours from his "inner eye." The brass and tin of the water boiler, its wood handles and the wooden table that support it, suffused the entire composition as he dissected the serving appliance into the barely recognizable Cubist vision. The Futurists embraced Cubism as should "men of the future." The paintings also sold well after the ground had been broken by the prolific French.

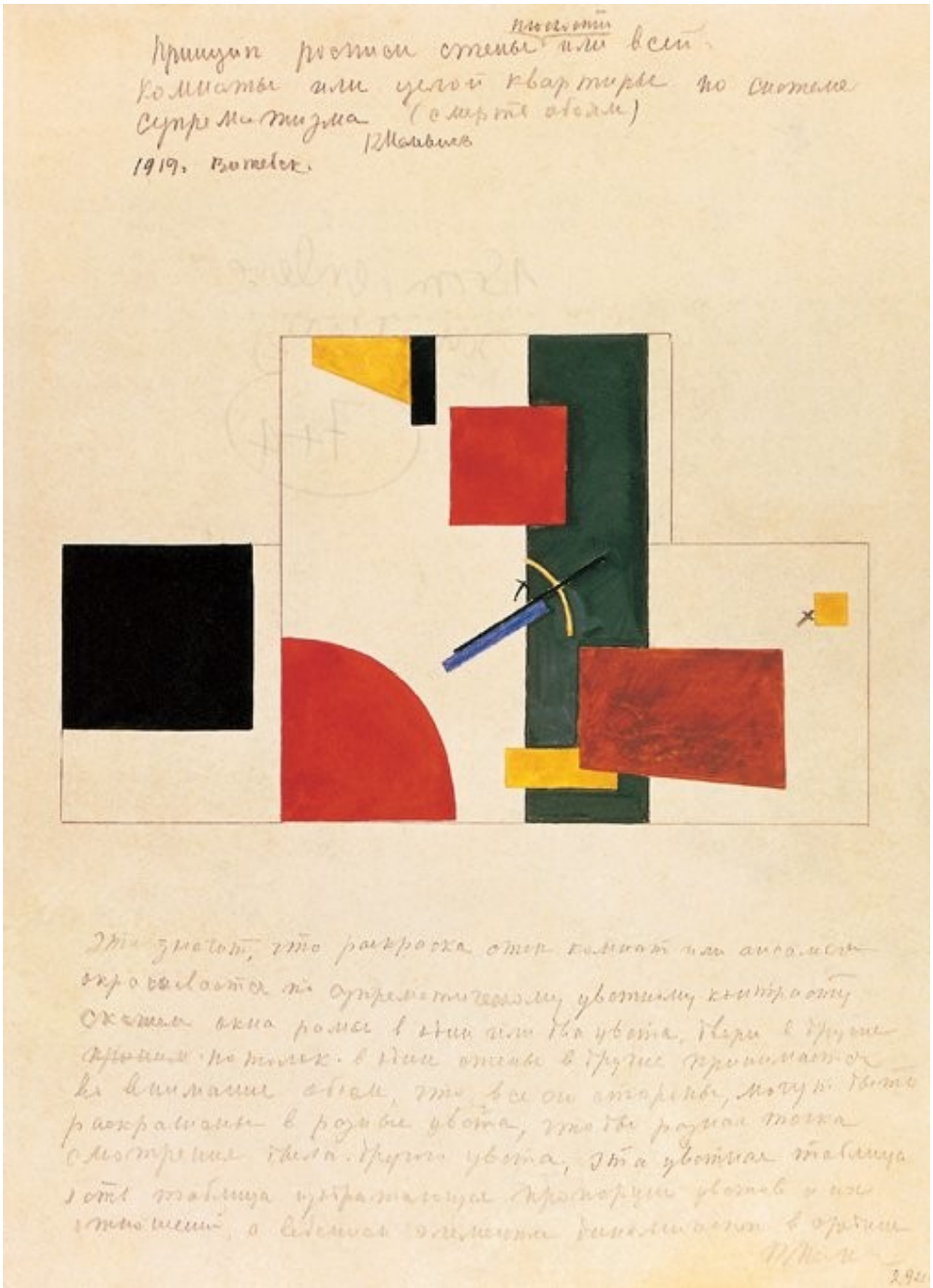
After exhibiting *Samovar II* together with his "burnished" works at the *Union of Youth* November show in 1913, Malevich lost no time in sending it to the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1914. *Samovar II* was hung in

his solo retrospective show in December 1919, but at both the Salon and later at the Retrospective the painting was hung upside-down.

While his Cubist work, Lamp/Instruments (end of 1913) had no worries about being rotated 180 degrees, his title, when compared to the subject matter, caused second looks. While Malevich might have had a lamp in front of him (or before his "inner eye") the resulting oil on canvas has a definite musical theme. What appear to be organ pipes sprout from its centre amid musical symbols: the scroll of a violin, the shape of a truncated guitar, a white-on-black harpsichord keyboard, piano pedals, felt piano hammers, musical notes and a burled wooden panel that suggests a sound board. An alternative title to this painting was *Musical Instrument*, and it stayed.

The French Cubists further intruded their collage style into Malevich's work as he converted a complex pencil sketch into a simpler and less busy oil titled *Lady at the Tram Stop*. His original painting includes much of the street furniture shown in the preliminary sketch, but he layered over the clutter to achieve the less complex composition. Also, there is no "lady." The scene was created to explore the variety of sights one might see while standing on the street waiting for a tram. Everything from baker's buns in a window to a man peering out from under a bowler hat join window shutters, roof peaks, staircases and a white number board centred in the canvas. As a nod to the Cubist tradition, he even peeled back a frame to reveal the ubiquitous "Cubist Bottle."

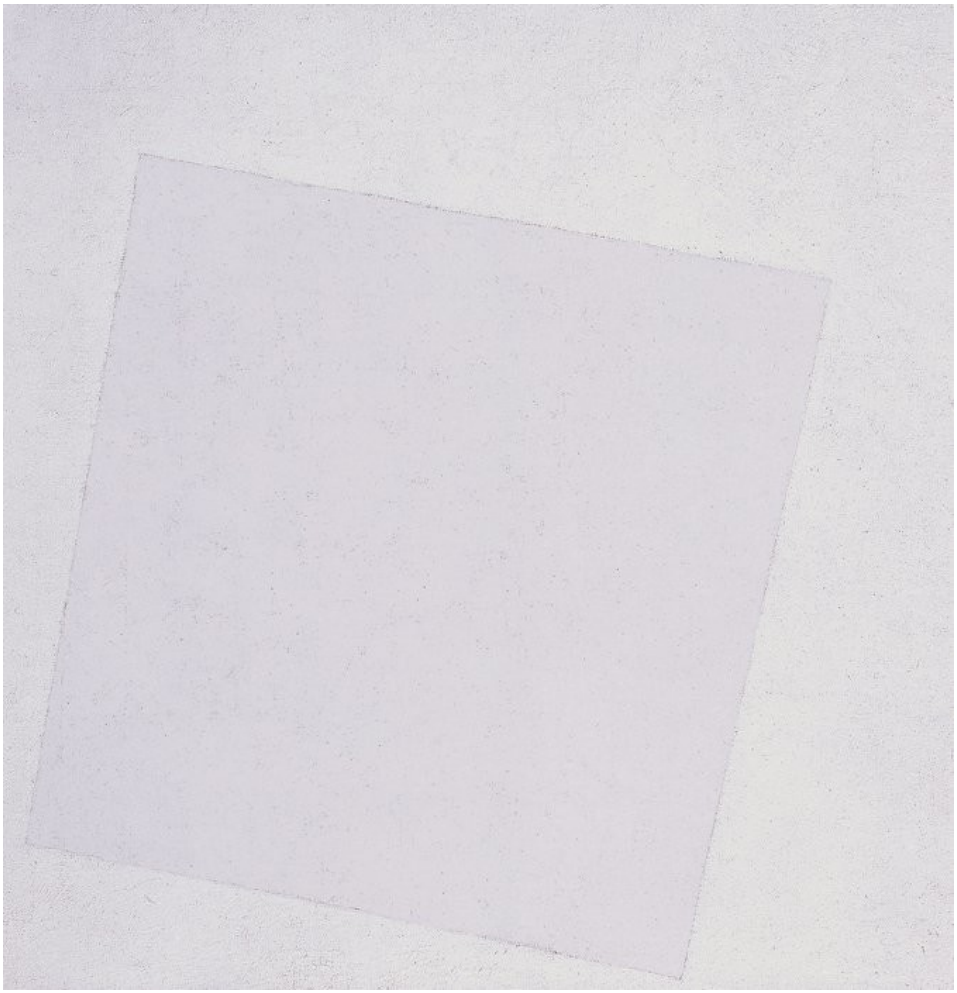
This painting made it to the February 1914 *Jack of Diamonds* exhibition. It never sold and was left in Berlin during Malevich's trip there in 1927.



Decorative Drawing for a Rostrum, 1919.
Size of image as defined by Malevich:

12.7 x 21 cm, size of sheet : 34 x 24.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

III. Suprematism



Suprematist Composition:
White on White, spring-summer 1918.
Oil on canvas, 78.7 x 78.7 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The years 1913-1915 were both a crisis and watershed period for

Malevich. He spent the summer of 1913 at Mikhail Matyushin's summer estate in Usikirkko, Finland. The composer-painter had also invited the poet-philosopher Alexei Kruchenykh, and the three friends composed the Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun* (Illustration 1, 2, 3, 4). Malevich designed costumes and backdrops as the libretto and music came together in a baffling mix of atonal music, absurdist poetry and Cubo-Futurist sets. Indeed the original performances caused raucous scenes in the theatre. The opera, staged at the Luna Park Theatre in St. Petersburg, presaged later Dada *Theatre of the Absurd*. The group also developed the concept of "alogism" – an irrational statement, absurdity. The creators jointly published a manifesto claiming their idea was to "… free themselves from the outdated law of causality and bounds of logic."

"For the artist," Malevich said, "reason is a form of imprisonment."

To bolster his latest lunge into this realm beyond sensory cognition, he poured over the philosopher Hegel's dialectic – mankind can only achieve its highest spiritual consciousness through endless self-perpetuating struggle between ideals, and the eventual synthesizing of all opposites, a developing destructive nihilism. He scrutinized Nietzsche, who believed our whole process of reason concerning "reality" and "being" depended on our belief in the "ego" as a substance, as "the sole reality from which we ascribed reality to things in general". We tend to interpret the "subject" so the ego counts as a substance, as the cause of all deeds. This denies religions such as Christianity and the belief in a supreme being and flew in the face of Malevich's inherited Catholicism, but, as with Futurism and Cubism, he chose what he needed to preserve.

His 1914 painting Englishman in Moscow brought his expanded intellectual ponderings verbally into his visualization. What had been a few numbers in *Tram Stop* became a virtual essay penned across the face of this canvas. His rejection of the reality of visual perceptions in favour of the inner reality of the intellect is given fanciful support that is almost a lampoon when compared to the austerity of his future work. While his earlier efforts of 1912-13 had filtered natural objects through the disassembling practices of Cubism and Futurism, *Englishman* treats the viewer to a delightful collage of readily identifiable "things". It has the feel of a treasure map layered with clues to the solving of a mystery.

A sabre and candle hold the foreground stage in front of a vertical, white floating fish bisected by a short ladder that carries the eye to three bayonets. A red arrow whips behind this lot like an imperial sash across the chest of a top-hatted, high-collared man peering out at the

viewer from behind the floating vertical fish. He grits his teeth and from his left ear (or where it would be) comes a row of saw teeth. Also bisecting the fish just below its head is a miniature painting of a Russian Orthodox Church with three cross-topped cupolas (*lukovitsy*) symbolizing candle flames and the prayers of the faithful, and representing the Holy Trinity.[17] The painting is topped by a red spoon, an iconic symbol for the Holy Communion where, in the Orthodox tradition, the gifts of bread and wine are carried to the worshipper by spoon from the tray and chalice.[18]

The religious symbolism is plain to see: the spoon, the church, its three domes representing the Holy Trinity, the fishes multiplied by Christ (or "I will make you a fisher of men"), the candle, and even the cavalry sabre standing in for the spear that pierced Christ's side on the Cross. Does the ladder represent the one used by his disciples when they lowered the body? Even the Cross itself can be implied from the intersection of the sword and the candle.

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, "Podgy", 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.2 x 21.2 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, "Ill-intentioned", 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.3 x 21.3 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

Costume for *Victory over the Sun*
from Matyushin and Ruchenykh, "Enemy", 1913.
Pencil, gouache and Indian ink on paper, 27.2 x 21.3 cm.
State Museum of Theatre and Music, St. Petersburg.

[17] Reprinted from *Orthodox Life,* Vol. 1 Number 3, May-June 1950.

[18] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, London, Penguin Books, 1997.

Quadrilateral, known as *Black Square*,
summer 1915. Oil on canvas, 79.9 x 79.9 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Though Cyrillic words don't offer illumination to Western Europeans, they do nail down the identity of a Russian artist. Charlotte Douglas, a Malevich biographer, offers this translation of his text:

"The two words at the top and bottom of the canvas are *zatmeni* (eclipse) and *chastichnoe* (partial). Their most immediate reference is to the face half blocked by the vertical fish. The word for eclipse is further divided into another two words that convey the notion 'beyond the dark', or 'beyond that which is doing the obscuring'. Similarly,

chastichnoe has been divided in such a way to isolate the word *chas* (hour) from the suffix of an adverbial adjective, - *noe* (hourly) The two words written across the scissors just to the right of the half face are *skakovoe obshchestvo* (galloping society). The semantic ambiguity in Russian is the same as it is in English: the phrase may connote a riding club, or society that in general is galloping into the future."[19]

Is this painting, exhibited in the *First Futurist Exhibition* – the *V Trolley Show* – in 1915 one last nudge by Malevich to remind us of the visual world's deception and the true meanings that lie behind it? Creating *Englishman in Moscow* seems to be one of many catharses for Malevich, a ridding himself of the last of his visual baggage before stepping off into the void of his non-objective pursuit.

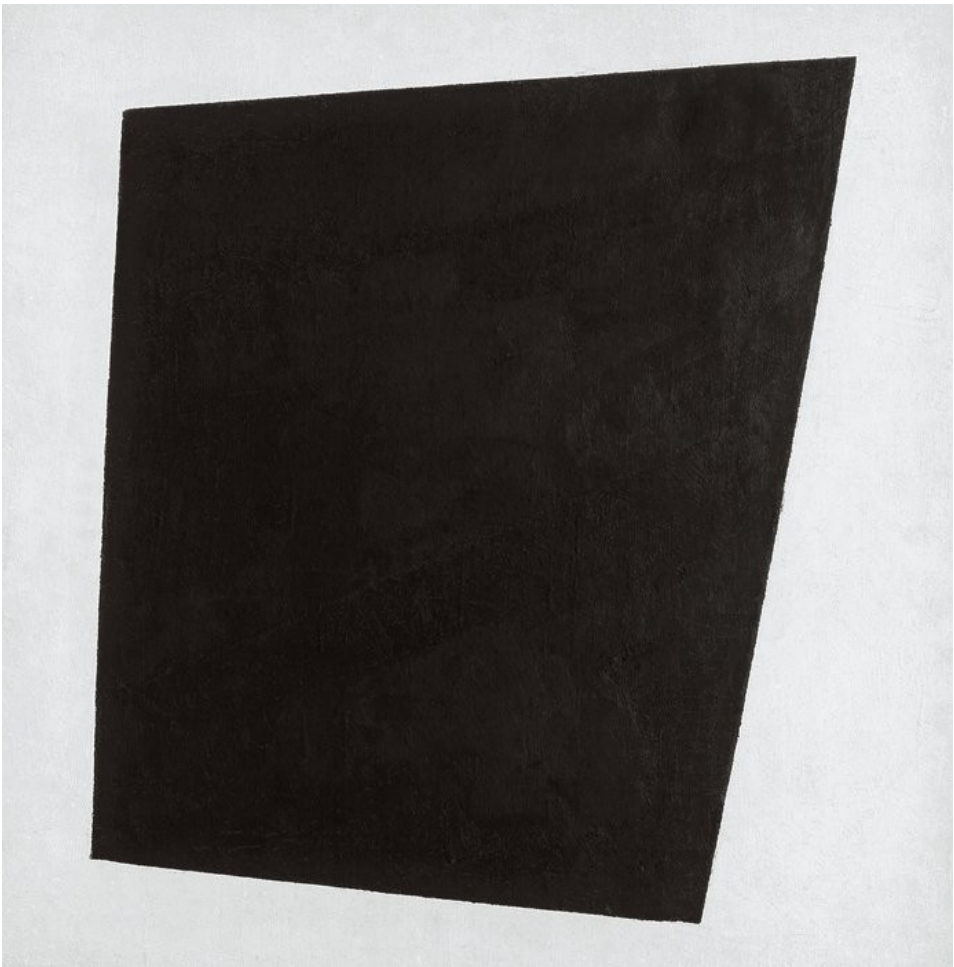
He extended his "destruction" scenario attached to the fragmenting and faceting of natural forms in Cubism, and, contrary to the intent of Cubism's inventors, applied it to all of nature, abandoning recognizable subjects to the use of geometric shapes. He embraced a higher reality behind the world of accepted appearances, a world available only to those of brilliantly developed intuition – artists like himself. During the 1913-1915 period, and triggered largely by his work on the play *Victory Over the Sun*, with its themes of time travel and magic, the black square, the symbolic coffin for the sun, entered his lexicon of images. The play's funeral for the sun and tinkering with the measurement of time opened many doors to the future. He began exploring theories of space and time.

C.H. Hinton's 1904 book, *The Fourth Dimension* was urged upon Malevich by his friend the painter-composer Mikhail Matiushin. The popularization of the concept of a fourth dimension was largely a product of Theosophy through the book *Man the Square* by Claude Bragdon. But the very idea of a dimension beyond the physical three spatial dimensions of known space fits nicely with Malevich's mystical world beyond normal intellect and sensory perception. It allowed him to provide a world of objects developed purely in the mind of the artist representing this ephemeral dimension. He began with the simplest basic shape, the square.

In the 1915 *Suprematist Manifesto*, he remembered, "When, in the year 1913, in my desperate attempt to free art from the ballast of objectivity, I took refuge in the square form and exhibited a picture which consisted of nothing more than a black square on a white field. The critics and along with them the public sighed. 'Everything which we loved is lost. We are in a desert…Before us is nothing but a black square

on a white background!' The square seemed incomprehensible and dangerous to the critics and the public…and this, of course was to be expected. The ascent to the heights of non-objective art is arduous and painful…but it is nevertheless rewarding."

[19] *Op. Cit.,* Charlotte Douglas, *Malevich*, p. 82.



Construction No. 31, motif: 1915-1916, version: 1917.
Oil on canvas, 75 x 75 cm. Private Collection, New York.

Black and White. Suprematist Composition, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm. Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity,* published in 1905, required time to be considered as a co-ordinate dimension to pinpoint the location of any event, making time – alongside the three spatial dimensions – a fourth dimension. As Hinton wrote: "Apart from the interest of speculations of this kind they have considerable value; for they enable us to express in intelligible terms things of which we can form no image. They supply us, as it were, with scaffolding, which the mind can make use of in building up its conceptions. And the additional gain to our power of representation is very great. "[20]

Combining this “space-time” element of the relativity theory with earlier work by the nineteenth-century mathematician, Bernhard Riemann (1826-1866) that offered the possibility of a fourth *spatial* dimension, fuelled the basic premises of the Theosophical Society founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the writings of P. D. Uspensky. He explored work by Plato, Plutonius and the *Upanishads* (universal mystical ideas from earlier Vedic hymns that influence the rest of Hindu and Indian philosophy). By this time, Malevich had devolved his studies into the philosophers and mystics upon geometry and mystical associations attached to it, in turn, by centuries of seekers.

Riemann wrote: “Three spatial dimensions are obvious to its inhabitants and seem to exist at right angles to each other. Not noticed in local observations by its inhabitants, a “hidden” fourth spatial dimension causes the three clearly recognizable spatial dimensions to lose their apparent orthogonal (having a set of mutually perpendicular axes; meeting at right angles) relationship eventually. On a global scale the four-space hypersphere has positively curved space, although it doesn’t seem to be curved in the local vicinity any more than the lower-dimensional spherical surface does.”[21] While the generally accepted concept of the fourth dimension recognized infinity, the space it occupied was more or less flat. In order to perceive the fourth dimension we had to dispose of our trust in the three dimensions that formed our recognizable world. To this conclusion, C.H. Hinton shook his head:

“It is somewhat curious to notice that we can thus conceive of an existence relative to that which we enjoy must exist as a mere abstraction.”[22]

Malevich embraced the abstraction. As he wrote in his 1918 diary:

“This figure became a way for achievement of the light effect. …I saw that it is also possible to formulate a theme to a means. Some other artists lived with the feeling of pure painting, but they could not imagine an existence of painting as it is. They lived with *objectless* feelings, but created *subject* things. I found myself in this position too; it seemed to me that painting in its pure form is, say, empty, and that it is necessary to enclose some meanings into this form. On the other hand, the emotional storm of my painting feeling did not allow me to see images in their subject order, particularly, if the theme had no a picturesque origin. Naturalization of subjects did not stand up to criticism for me.”

Later he refined this concept further: “The representation of an object in itself (the objectivity as the aim of expression) is something

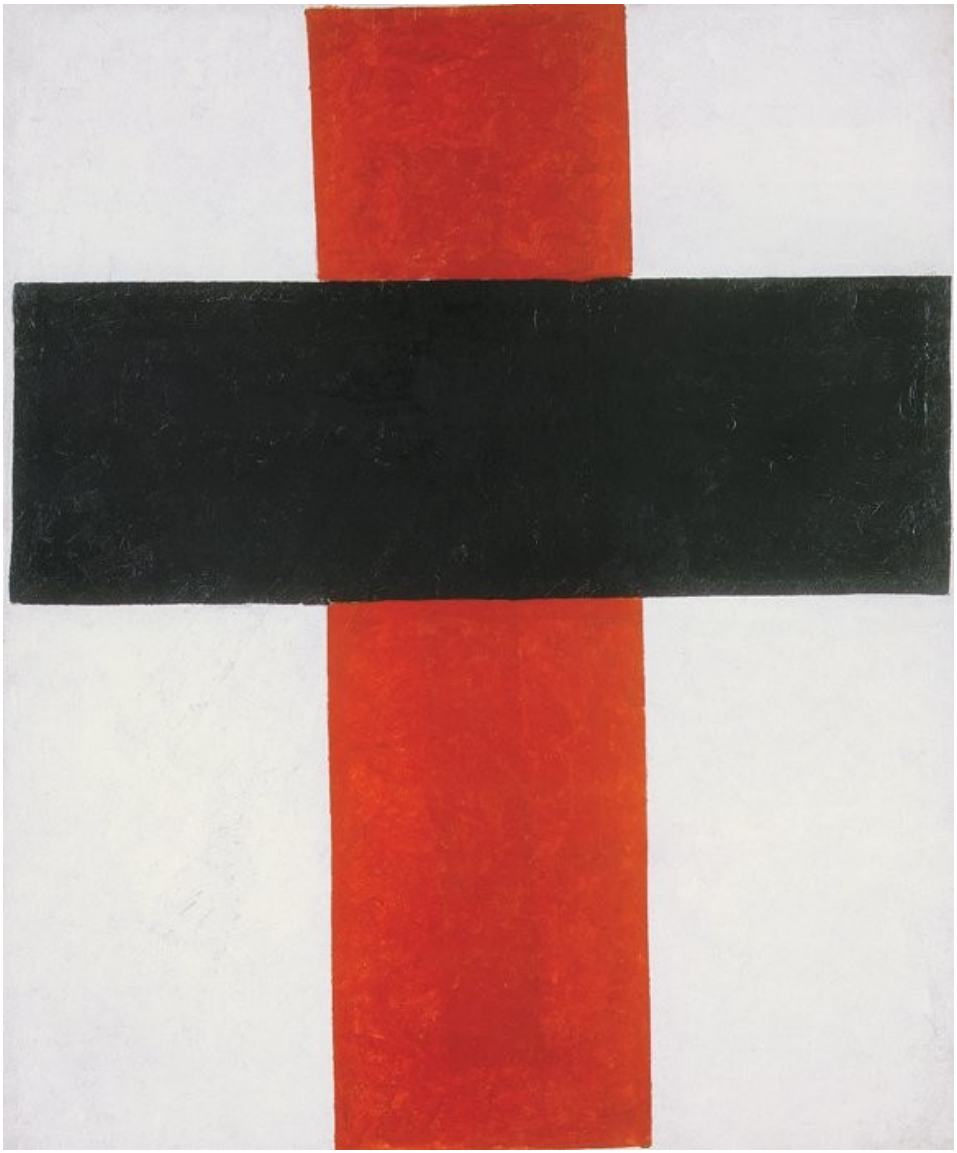
that has nothing to do with art, although the use of representation in a work of art does not rule out the possibility of it being of a high artistic order. For the Suprematist, therefore, the proper means is the one that provides the fullest expression of pure feeling and ignores the habitually-accepted object. The object in itself is meaningless to him; and the idea of the conscious mind is worthless. Feeling is the decisive factor...and thus art arrives at non-objective representation - at Suprematism."

Thoroughly steeped in ancient and contemporary philosophers, mystics and mathematicians plus a stew of writings on interpreting the fourth dimension, Malevich laid bare his throat to the critics. He stood by this new visual Suprematist language built around geometric shapes, pure colours and a complete absence of recognizable subject matter all set against the whiteness of infinity.

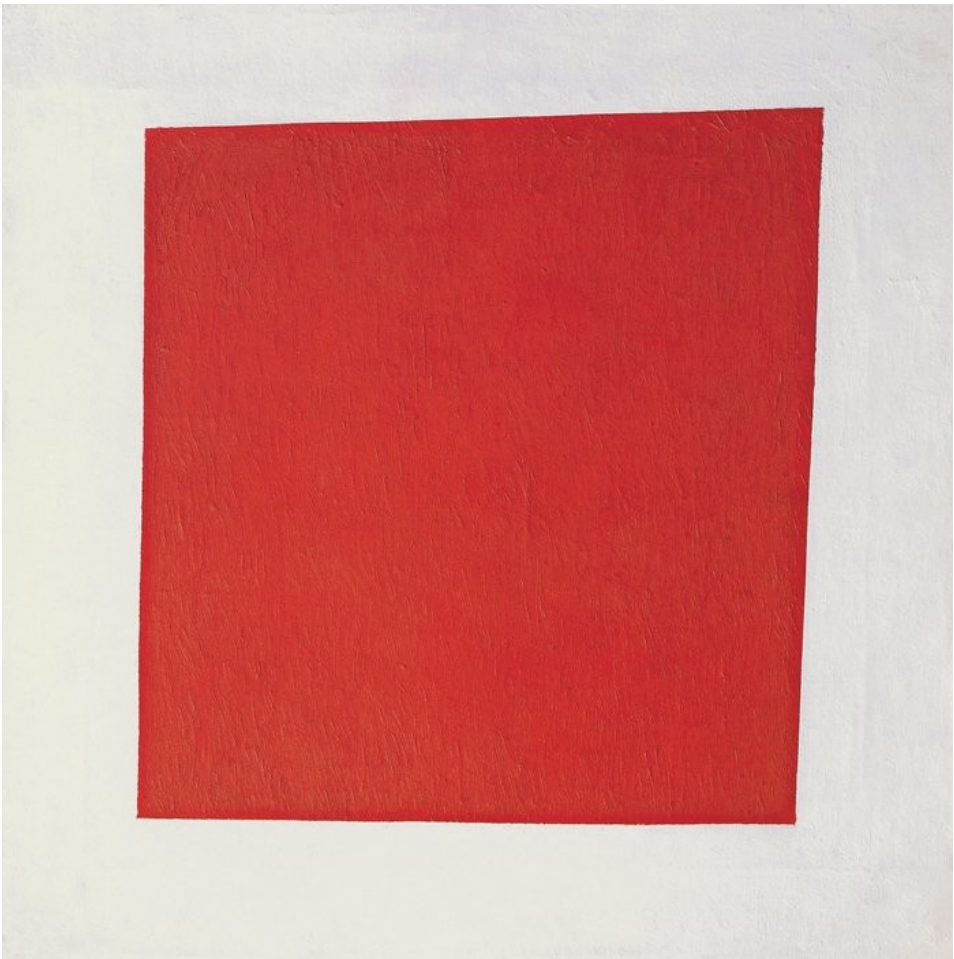
[20] Charles H. Hinton, Copyright 1980 by Dover Publications, Inc.

[21] *Hyperspheres, Hyperspace and the Fourth Spatial Dimension, Subtitle: A Look at the Universe as a Higher-Dimensional Brain World.*

[22] Selected Writings of Charles H. Hinton: *Scientific Romances,* Vol. 1 (1884), *Speculations on the Fourth Dimension,* Dover Publications, Inc., p. 1-22.



Solemn Suprematist Cross, 1920-1921.
Oil on canvas, 84 x 69.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Red Square, motif: 1915, version: c. 1916-1917.
Oil on canvas, 53 x 53 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Besides a number of paintings, he created lithographs and decorations, and lent his new art form to illustrating Futurist books together with Nikolai Kulbin and Olga Rozanova. His wartime contribution consisted of patriotic lithographs appearing as *luboks*, folk prints that told a story with a combination of text and images adhering to the Russian icon and manuscript style, popular with low to middle-class citizens.

But thirty-nine of his *Suprematist* compositions – painted under a

cloak of secrecy – that assured his place in art history were launched in Petrograd during December 1915 under the show title “0.10”. The exhibit featured a signature black square hung across the high corner of the exhibition space as was typical of the icons in a Russian Orthodox home. The rest of his works appear to have been fired at the wall with a shotgun in the attempt to squeeze as many images into the space as possible. The cluttered result diminished the impact of the individual works.

The ultimate form, or “zero form”, was a black square suspended against white. Its opposite number would become the pure white form against a white background, indicating to Malevich “pure movement”. This black square became his signature. Virtually the ultimate in static objects, the “Black Square” hangs suspended against its white background contrary to the “tensions and dynamic movement” promised by the Suprematists who included themselves as acolytes of the concepts penned in Malevich’s densely convoluted manifesto that accompanied the work. Recent X-ray photography has revealed that the black paint actually covers a composition of coloured objects.[23] The surface or “face” of the square and other Suprematist shapes was a living thing to Malevich.

“Any painting surface is more alive than any face,” he wrote in his manifesto. “…a surface lives, it has been born. It is the face of the new art. The *Square* is a living royal infant.”

His art served as a communication artery between the divine intellect and the natural perceived world. His shapes – line segments, triangles, circles, angles, ovals, rectangles and squares – each had weight and dynamics ascribed to them and existed in fluid relationships to each other against a bottomless white plane that suggested infinity.

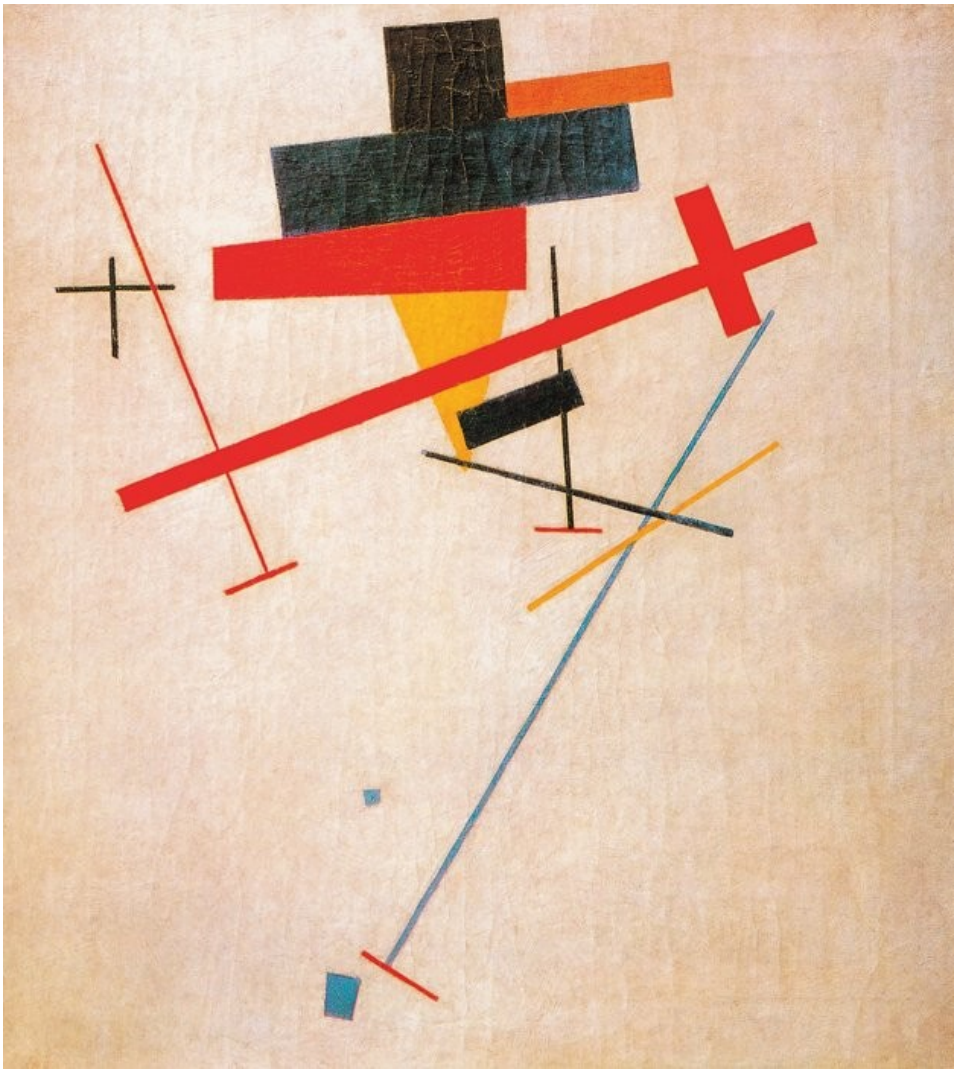
On the subject of this departure from object-art, Malevich said: “Excitement is a cosmic flame that lives on that which is objectless.” And then to amplify this welding of concept and consequence he added “Excitement, like molten copper in a blast furnace, seethes in a state that is pure objectless. Excitement-combustion is the supreme white force that sets thought into motion. Excitement is like the flame of a volcano that flickers within a human being without the goal of meaning. A human being is like a volcano of excitements whereas thought is concerned with perfections.”[24]

None of this revolution in artistic thought occurred in a vacuum. As Malevich struggled to feed himself and his family, compose his raison d’être, the *Suprematist Manifesto*, and create thirty-nine paintings, the

year 1915 was one of turmoil and strife. The Germans, though now committed to fighting a two-front war, were more than a match for the fops, wastrels and illiterate thugs of the Imperial Russian Army officer class. More concerned with dressing up in tailored uniforms, decorating themselves with meaningless medals and attending fashionable parties, they had no gift for combat or logistics and assumed that sheer numbers of peasant cannon fodder would overwhelm their enemies. German grit, organization and technology proved them wrong.

[23] John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*.

[24] *Kasimir Malevich, Suprematism,* in Jean-Claude Marcadé*, An Approach to the Writings of Malevich,* Soviet Union 5, No. 2 (1978).



Magnetic Construction, 1916.
Oil on canvas, 49 x 44 cm.
Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen.

Suprematist Composition, 1915-1916.
Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 35.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Behind the front, waves of strikes swept across Russia and were

crushed by the Czar's squadrons of mounted police at Kostroma and Ivanovo-Voznesénsk. In Moscow, the Duma was in chaos as the bourgeois parties tried to form a "Progressive Bloc" seeking government reforms. In August 1914, St. Petersburg became Petrograd and a year later Petrograd strikers protested against the slaughter of strikers in Ivanovo-Voznesénsk. Gunfire resounded in the streets. The Petrograd workers' Duma had degenerated into a shouting match and, at the front, the army was collapsing.

The Austrians and Germans combined to begin the route of the Russian Army called the Great Retreat. Only Russia's decrepit and failing rail system slowed the advancing enemy. Armed soldiers separated from their units, deserters and opportunistic criminals now streamed up and down Petrograd's streets. Czarist rear guard troops and police rushed about the city wherever violence broke out. To try and stem the retreat, Czar Nicholas decided to take command of his army and to be with his troops at the approaching front.

This action by Czar Nicholas doomed his reign – separating him from the seat of government where he was needed for decision-making to a dubious place at the head of his fleeing army – and placed him at the mercy of militarists and politicians who wanted him and the rest of the Romanov line dead. As Imperial rule approached its nadir and ultimate extinction, Malevich forged ahead. Could there have been some regret as he reduced his art to abstract symbolism that his isolation from mainstream Russian art might be judged more than just an aesthetic revolt? As dissenters and strikers were shoved against walls and bayoneted by the troops to save ammunition, might he have seen himself amongst them? Or could he have seen his artistic revolution as fitting in with the progressive reforms then in the ascension? Many artists and writers fled Russia during this transitional period before the borders were sealed. Malevich chose to remain, hoping for the best.

As anticipated, first came the paintings and then began the war of words. Malevich claimed "Suprematism is the beginning of a new civilization. Creation exists only where paintings present shapes that take nothing from what has been created in nature."

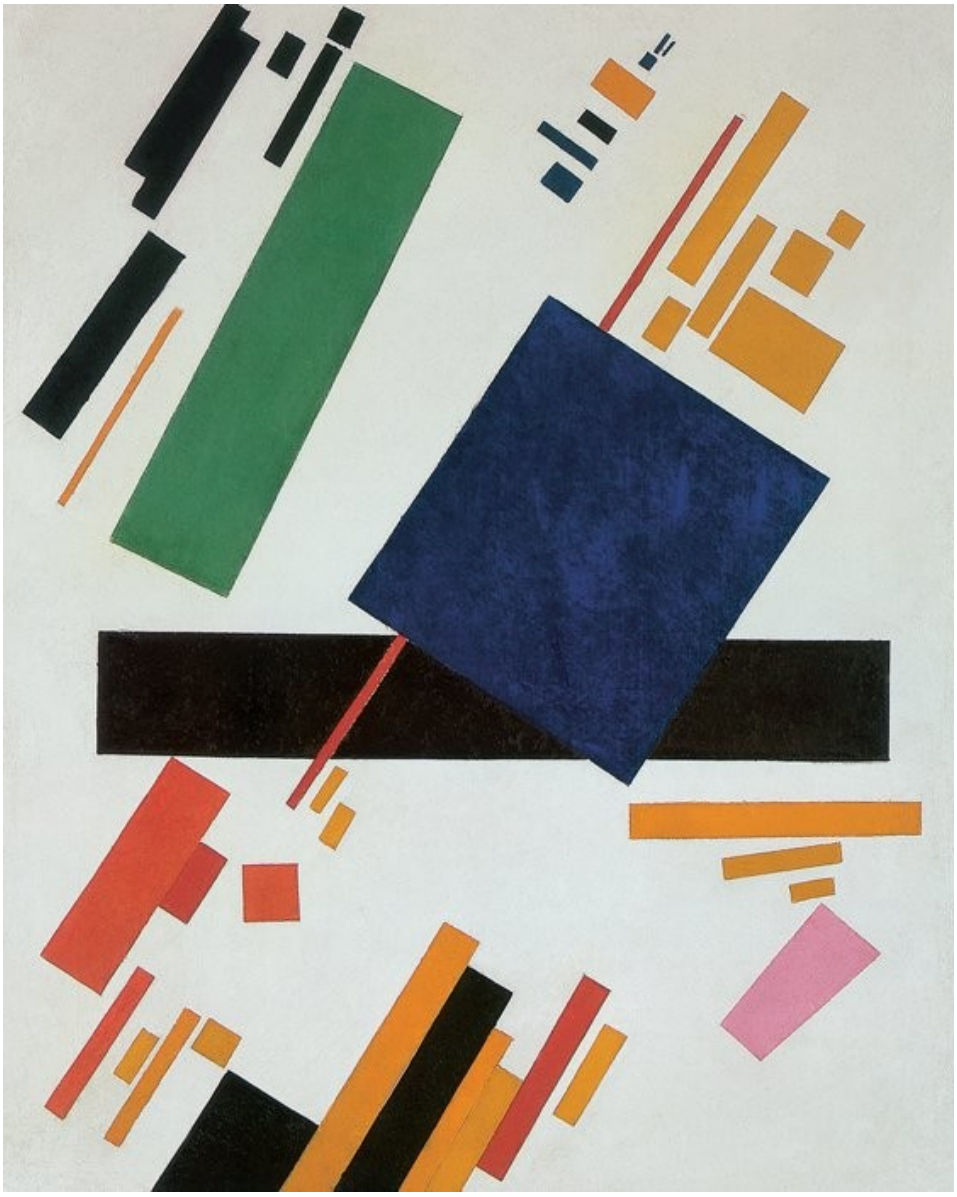
In a typical example of the old school critics' negative response, B. Lopatin said in *Day,* "Everything is dry and monotonous, without art and without individuality."

Clouds of words from supporters and detractors surrounded the creation of these curious paintings of suspended and juxtaposed geometric shapes coupled with their enigmatic titles: *Painterly*

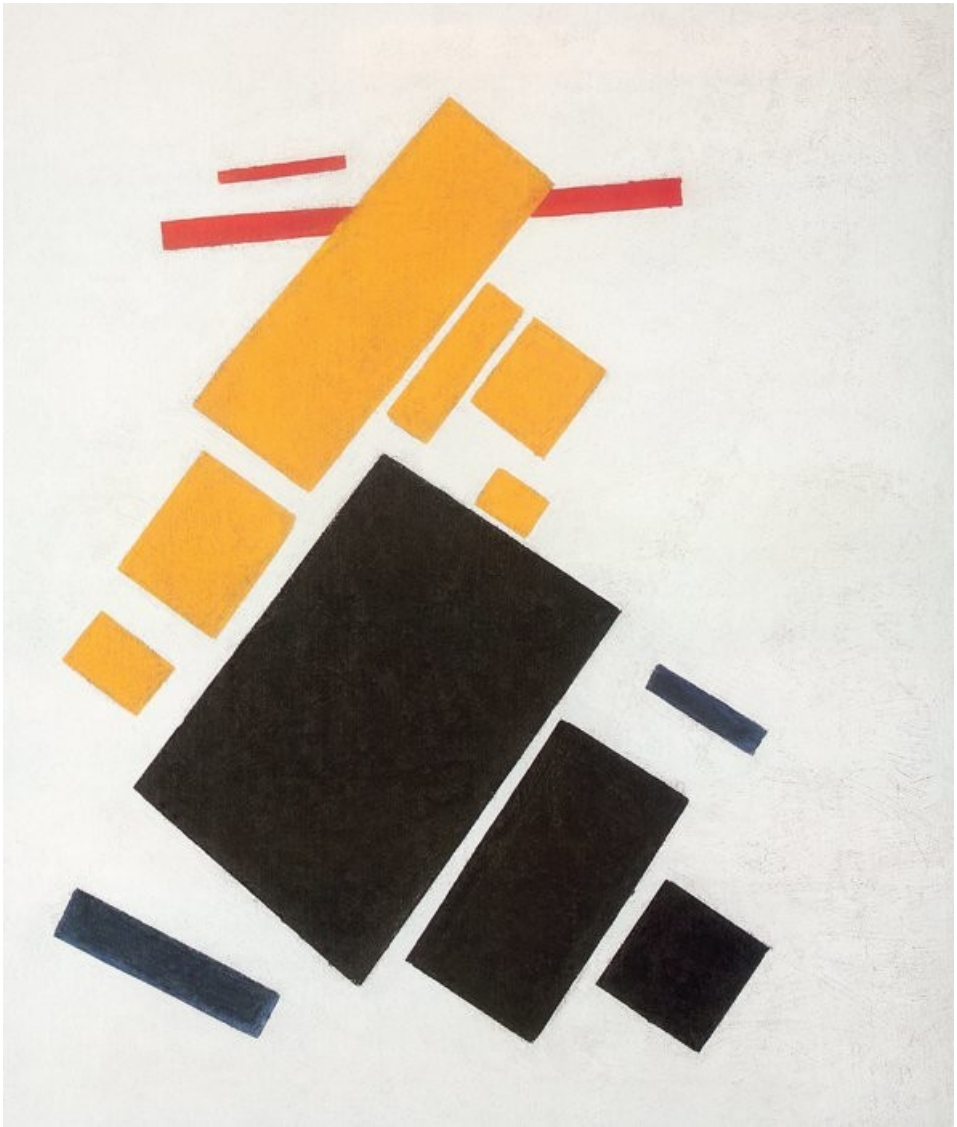
Realization of a Football Player, Suprematist Painting: Aeroplane in flight, White Square on White. While his words tried to explain what he was thinking during the creative process, without those words the paintings and drawings gave no hint of a relationship to any physical subject matter.

Those who knew him could not have been surprized at this sudden body of work thrown up on the walls complete with a working manifesto. A prudent course would have been to introduce two or three examples to test the waters. However, Kasimir Malevich had absorbed from his beloved peasant farmers more than a taste for garlic-rubbed bacon. Their straightforward way of life, their acceptance of the town boy who always asked questions and their love of colour and decoration in their hard lives had filled his otherwise lonely peripatetic days with the confidence he needed. As he hung the “0.10” exhibition in the imposing, colonnaded Dobychina Gallery at 7 Marsovo Pole in Petrograd, not far from the Czar’s Winter Palace, he must have been convinced that these paintings were the cornerstones of his eventual fame.

Most studies agree that his drawings for the sets and costumes of *Victory over the Sun* in 1913 nudged him into his eventual direction. They represent simplified versions of his Cubo-Futurist style that also happen to be framed in a square format.



Suprematist Composition, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 70.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Suprematist Composition:
Airplane Flying, 1915 (dated on reverse 1914).
Oil on canvas, 57.3 x 48.3 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The 1913 pencil drawing, *Study for the Décor of Victory over the Sun, Act 2, Scene 5* stands alongside *Suprematism: Square on a Diagonal Surface*

drawn in 1915. While the graphite sketches hint at the stage, wings and backdrop of a stage, they are more motivating experiments with Cubism in three dimensions than physical stage appearance explanations. The *Study for the Décor…* is a simple square divided diagonally from its lower left to upper right corners, creating black and white equilateral triangles. They are suspended by line segments from the four corners of the drawn frame. This diagonal motif is repeated in *Alogical Composition: Man Smoking a Pipe* (Illustration 1, 2, 3) created back in 1913 in pencil on grid paper where the triangle conceals part of the man's face and is balanced by a line of three small descending circles, other line segments, two rectangles and a shaded column. Here, it is not clear whether the black triangle is concealing part of the objects drawn behind it, or whether the triangle reveals a dark void behind the objects that are actually in the foreground and have been cut away.

In all these drawings, geometric shapes play the roles of stage geography, thrust panels, overhead flaps, flies, flats, on-stage construction and backdrops. They have not crossed over to pure shapes without connection to subjects. It was later, in 1915, that Malevich's *Alogic Compositions* began to push back away from the subject-security blanket. Following the theory of the Dada-developed alogism, a nonsensical statement or dialogue alluded to earlier, these drawings begin in 1914 as Cubist non-sequiturs such as depicting all the Cubist-filtered elements of a violin intruded upon by a large black rectangle and a spoon. By 1915 the number of elements had shrunk and the geometry had been simplified without a word of explanation in the title. Yet, in each of these enigmatic little drawings, Malevich keeps one foot on dry land by including at least one recognizable element within the edgy composition. We find a shovel, an arrow, a chevron, musical notes, a musical clef, etc. in each of the 1915 pencil renderings, the minimization continuing until the purging was complete.

Possibly for some pedagogical reason to ease the "explain game" many viewers initiate when confronted with non-objective art – to discover a familiar point of departure – Malevich chose to name some of his Suprematist works. One of them that made the 1915 show was titled, *Aeroplane Flying*.

The act of flight had long excited him, as it had most of the Futurists, being the ultimate example of kinetic movement. In his *The Non-Objective World – The Manifesto of Suprematism*, Malevich introduced photographs of subjects that interested the academic "naturalist" painter. Four static genre photos of a peasant with his accordion, a

troika with its three horses, a hunting dog frozen in point and a peasant farmer's family snapshot were all very sedate. On the facing page, a montage of Futurist "stimulator" photos showing motor boats, dirigibles, locomotives, busy city traffic, the night pierced by searchlights, aeroplanes, steamships and construction girders all banged together. Following this noisy collection came a page of aerial mapping photos, and the fleets of aeroplanes.

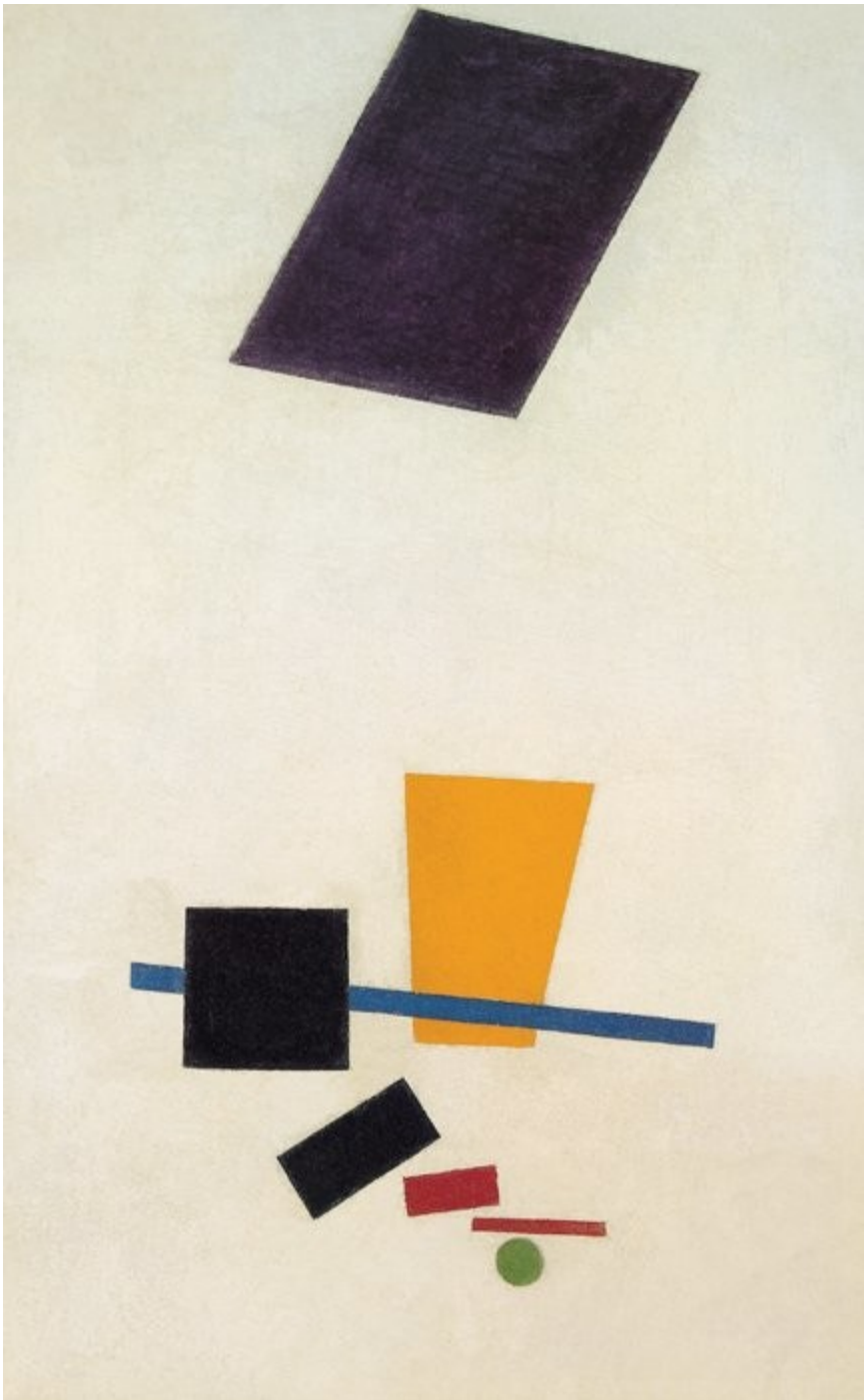
Not ready to give up his Futurist roots, flight or dynamic movement became a theme in many Suprematist works. *Aeroplane Flying* offers us only eleven rectangles and two line segments. However, the rectangles are moving across the canvas diagonally and comprise five black rectangles standing in for the fuselage and six yellow rectangles grouped to form the wings, yellow being the primary colour of the dope used to coat the canvas wings of the period. The yellow wings cut across a red line segment that symbolizes the horizon and we have *Aeroplane Flying*. Admittedly, these are "baby steps" compared to the more complex works titled simply *Suprematist Composition*, but Malevich does extend a hand to his audience like the key to a cipher or a puzzle and we follow along. Once over the hurdle that this painting represents the *sense of flight* and not the slavish reproduction of the flight instrument itself, the mind is free to explore the other untitled paintings for their sensory projections.

Though the viewer is cast adrift from the world of subjective art, that exile does not obscure the intensity of the image juxtapositions, nor the mental and ocular gymnastics required to fully appreciate the exhilaration of Malevich's concepts. An example of Suprematism's ability to generate power is *Untitled (Suprematism)*, another early 1915 canvas that today hangs in the Russian Museum after being evicted with other Malevich works when the Leningrad Museum of Artistic Culture was padlocked in 1927.

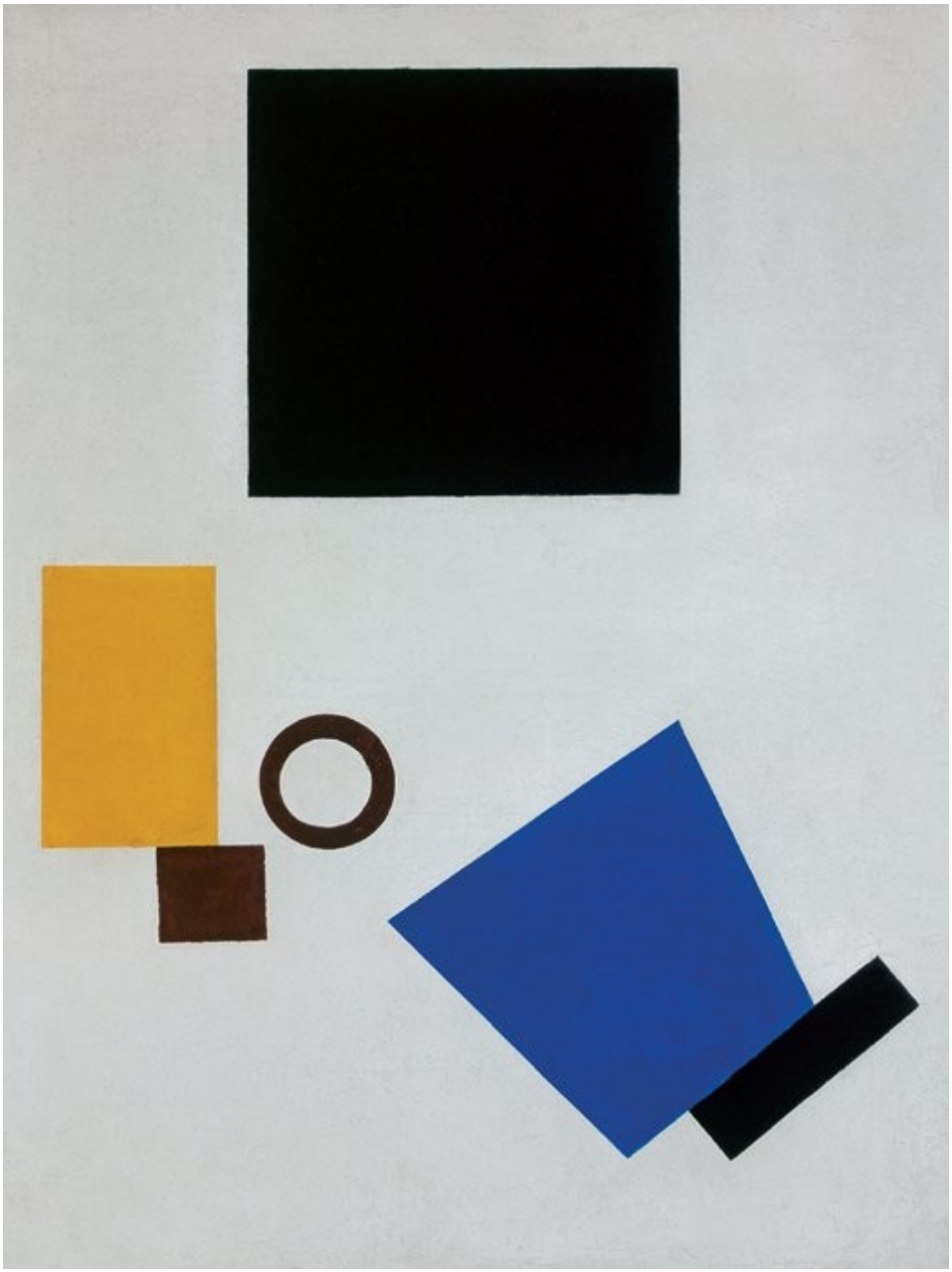
Alogical Composition: Man Smoking a Pipe, 1913.
Pencil and collage on graph paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 10.5 x 8.5 cm, size of sheet: 12.8 x 10.1 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 9 x 6.5 cm, size of sheet: 16.4 x 11.2 cm.

Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined
by Malevich: 8.5 x 6.6 cm, size of sheet: 16.4 x 11.2 cm.



Painterly Realism of a Football Player, summer-autumn 1915.
Oil on canvas, 70 x 44 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Self-Portrait in Two Dimensions,
summer-autumn 1915. Oil on canvas,
80 x 62 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

A great cacophony streams from the canvas as the eye is whipped across its surface, ploughing over the thick black shapes that divide the vertical composition in half. In the centre, a blue chevron pushes down upon a dog's breakfast of variable coloured rectangles superimposed over each other at odd angles as though shattered from a fall. To the right of this scrap heap, a clutch of smaller shapes spearheaded by pointy triangles, then a line of yellow chevrons rushes toward the painting's right edge, fleeing the carnage. Above the dividing lines a great yellow trapezoid hovers above a football-shaped red containment area crowded with small white and black geometric shapes. It is as though a dirigible is about to unload its bombs on a target. In the upper left, black triangles and rectangles appear to wait for the bombing event to conclude so they can rush in.

Everything here is speculative, but knowing Malevich's interest in the war as the conflict widened in 1915, this shadow play can easily be imagined. For someone not familiar with Malevich's thought processes, the white canvas littered with all this action, sound and fury can be enjoyed purely for its bravado like a breathless symphony played *con brio*.

One of these *Untitled (Suprematist Painting)* sprung directly from his stage set drawings for *Victory over the Sun*. Malevich even referred in a letter to the drawing's central black rectangle tipped back and climbing towards the upper left corner as "…an aeroplane." In the painting, the viewer is suspended above the action in a small red aeroplane (red rectangle) – perhaps an escort? Below, the large black aeroplane cruises above the mosaic of the earth, again with its yellow wings and the blue-red of the Russian insignia. While the bottomless white field implies infinite height, rectangles reveal ground objects in the distance beneath the plane. Movement is even more intensely suggested as the black aeroplane is above the centre of the vertical composition and will eventually slide off the top of the canvas as it moves along its way.

This may or may not be the correct interpretation. Malevich wasn't playing a game with the viewer. He substituted his pantheon of symbols for his thoughts of movement, weight, distance and hinting at the spatial fourth dimension. The *Suprematist Manifesto* did provide something of a Rosetta Stone to guide the viewer into a few uses of the symbols applied to achieve specific effects, such as:

The Basic Suprematist Element: The Square, 1913

The Basic Suprematist Element: the first Suprematist form to

develop out of the square (the circle), 1913

The second basic Suprematist element (the cross), 1913

The movement of the Suprematist Square, producing a new bi-planar Suprematist element two parallel joined rectangles), 1913

Elongation of the Suprematist Square (rectangle), 1913

Suprematist composition of squares (Four squares – white and black chequerboard), 1913

Contrasting Suprematist elements (square, cross, circle in vertical composition), 1913

From this basic tutorial, he supplied a series of graphite sketches showing how the geometric forms and their variations worked together to achieve various sensations:

Suprematist composition expressing the combined feeling of the circle and the square, 1913

Composition of Suprematist elements expressing the sensation of flight, 1914-1915

Composition of combined Suprematist elements, expressing the sensation of metallic sounds – dynamic (pale, metallic colours), 1915

Suprematist composition expressing the feeling of wireless telegraphy

Suprematist composition expressing magnetic attraction, 1914

Suprematist composition conveying the feeling of movement and resistance, 1916

Suprematist composition conveying a sense of the universe, 1916

Suprematist composition conveying a feeling of universal space, 1916

Suprematist composition conveying the feeling of a mystic “wave” from outer space, 1917

Suprematist composition conveying the feeling of a mystic will: unwelcome, 1915

Suprematist composition expressing a feeling of non-objectivity, 1919

Supremus No. 38, winter 1915-1916.
Oil on canvas, 102 x 66 cm.
Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

Supremus No. 67, motif: 1916, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 72 x 52 cm.

The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

These pencil drawings at the back of the *Suprematist Manifesto* must have exerted a relative calming effect. Taken with the somewhat tortured text, it became obvious that an entire way of *rationalizing* art had been put forth. There was more here than manipulation of colour, line, volume, value and light coupled with a desired emotional response. While Kandinsky had kicked open the door to non-objective art, Malevich had created a visual philosophy wherein the painting, through manipulation of basic shapes and colours, became a resonating sensory sounding board.

In 1914, Piet Mondrian had returned home to the Netherlands from Paris and was trapped there for the duration of the war. He had become involved with Cubism, but like Malevich sensed a deeper, more spiritual calling for his work and began his pursuit of the "truth" in painting once abstracted from the need for subject matter. Mondrian also gravitated toward primary colours and simple shapes to communicate his own visual harmonies. In 1919 he returned to Paris and began producing his grid-like paintings punctuated with pure colours. He wrote:

"I construct lines and colour combinations on a flat surface, in order to express general beauty with the utmost awareness. Nature (or, that which I see) inspires me, puts me, as with any painter, in an emotional state so that an urge comes about to make something, but I want to come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things…

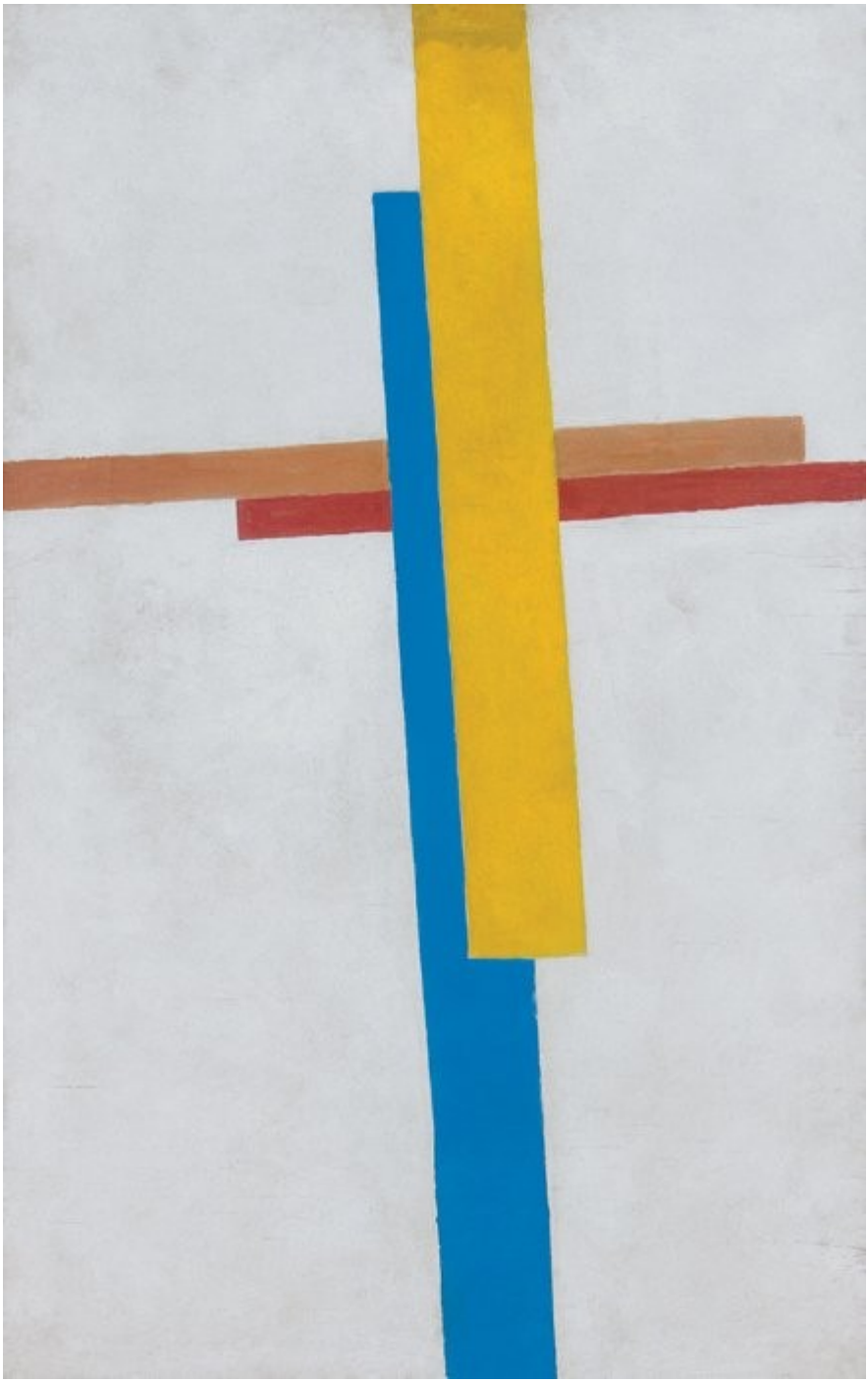
I believe it is possible that, through horizontal and vertical lines constructed with awareness, but not with calculation, led by high intuition, and brought to harmony and rhythm, these basic forms of beauty, supplemented if necessary by other direct lines or curves, can become a work of art, as strong as it is true."

The horrors of the Great War and its terrible realities drove many European artists into themselves for relief from the grey aftermath of the conflict that shredded an entire generation of promising lives. Like Mondrian, many artists were isolated by the war. Some, like Malevich, turned their art to wartime propaganda with posters and fliers. E. I. Lissitzky, one of Malevich's followers, created a Suprematist poster in 1920, *Beat the Whites [White Russians] with the Red [Red Army] Wedge* featuring a red triangle thrusting through parting rectangles to pierce a

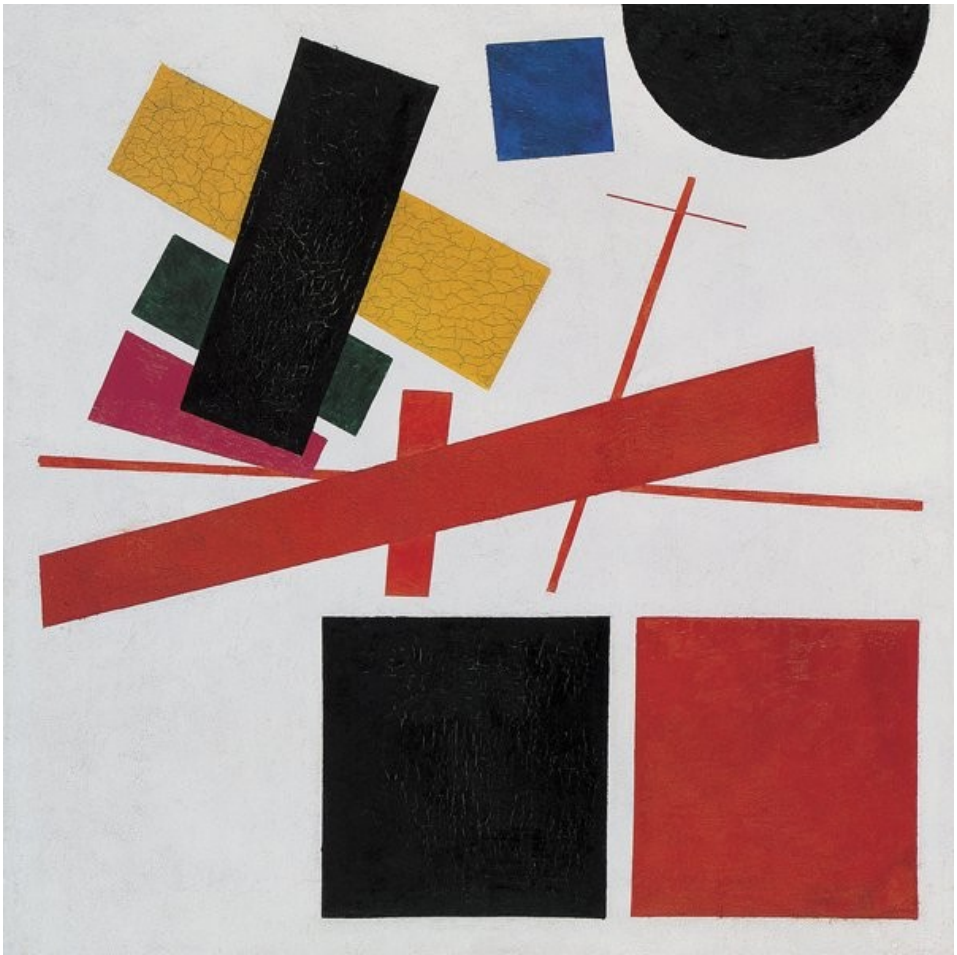
white circle against a black ground.

Many artists poets and writers were deeply affected by serving in the trenches. Others who survived or missed the combat for whatever reason could not ignore the economic crush, the daily struggle for basic needs – especially for the Germans and their allies, blockaded and starving. Cubism flourished as did the early Expressionists with their bold lines and palettes.

While Malevich soldiered away, creating his Suprematist body of work during the war years, his contemporaries searched their feelings amid the carnage and collateral damage to find their own personal styles. Expressionism became a loose term draped over these artists beginning in 1910 with Kandinsky and eventually including Franz Marc who was killed by a shell splinter at Verdun in 1916, Emil Nolde and, in 1918, the dodecaphonic (twelve-tone) music of Arnold Schoenberg which did away with the idea of 'key'. *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), co-founded by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, sought out the presentation of ugliness and strife to achieve change. *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), started up in 1911 by Kandinsky and Marc, eventually added Paul Klee who co-founded the Bauhaus. These artists expressed spiritual truths through their art. They believed in modern art as the connection between art and music, between the spiritual and symbolic associations of colour. Their aim was a spontaneous, intuitive approach to painting.



Magnetic Composition,
motif: 1916-1917, version: 1929.
Oil on plywood, 71.1 x 44.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Mixed Sensations, 1916. Oil on canvas, 74 x 76 cm.
Museum of Fine Art of Ekaterinburg, Ekaterinburg.

Grinding on to create the springboard to his eventual fame, Kasimir Malevich traced a parallel path to that of his contemporaries. With travel cut off and most communications difficult for four years in Europe, and with the 1917 Russian Revolution that toppled the Romanov Dynasty raging throughout the country, art was not a top priority among the warring nations.

Acknowledging Malevich's love of flight and with the Manifesto as a guide, the viewer can drop into the artist's deep spatial representation in Supremus No. 56 painted in 1916. Once again, the action is moving

from lower right to upper left, only this time the non-objective Suprematist formulae seem to be at odds. The overhead view is clearly stated and a directional line segment through the primary black, yellow and red rectangles supplements the climbing movement in time. Using pastel colours Malevich takes us *beneath* these rectangles to architecture below. Clusters of rectangles/lines suggest other moving objects on the same level as the larger rectangles. Spotted in the composition are a green disc, a blue curved shape and a small black oval. Their counterparts in the aerial procession is not clear, but the other moving constructions flowing beneath us remove virtually all concealment or metaphysical mystery inherent in Malevich's more static Suprematist works.

The Commissariat of Public Education bought this canvas from Malevich in 1919 on the occasion of his one-man show, and it now hangs in the Russian Museum.

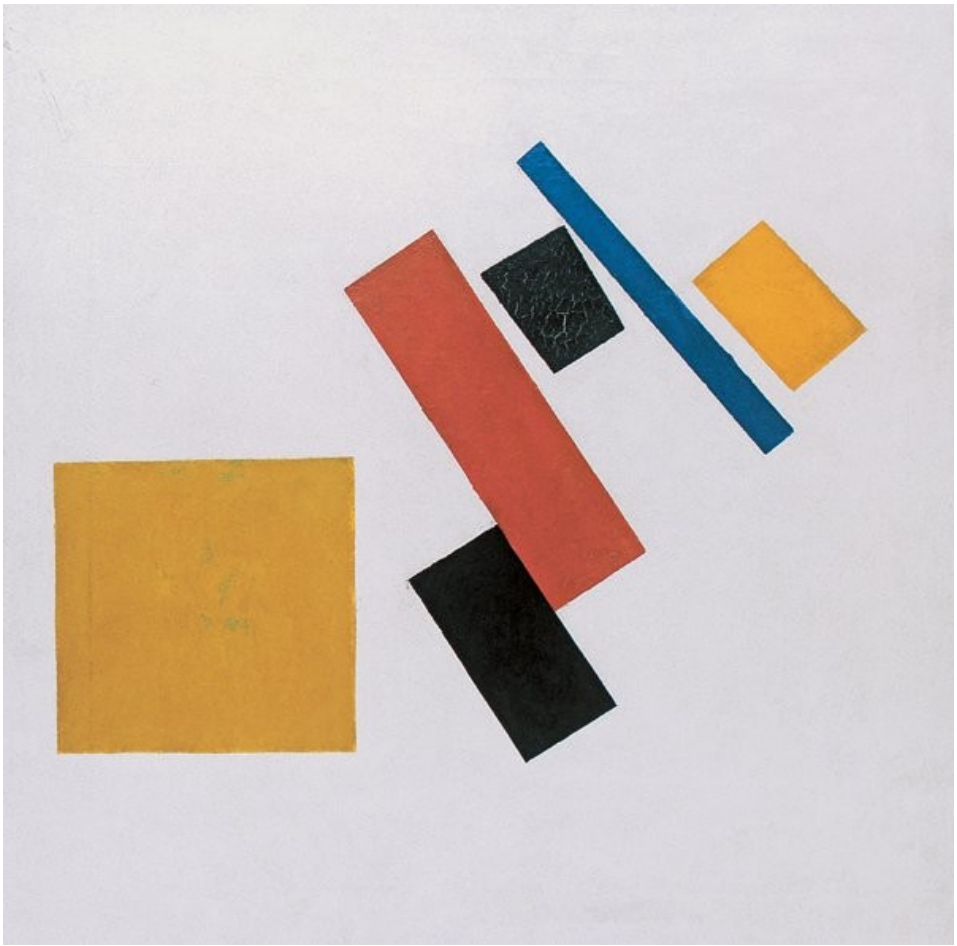
Not everything flew, nor was there always hand-holding available for many of Malevich's Suprematist paintings. A *Suprematist Composition* of 1917 now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York is a case in point. The first impression is a section slice of a gelatin mould with objects suspended in it not unlike fruit aspic. Malevich continues his use of space, depth and implied movement, but here he offers pastel nuances and a barely seen central figure that is key to the work.

Presaging his later white on white experiments, he recasts the bent-over suggestion of *The Woodcutter* from his canvas of 1912 and stages the dynamics of that painting in Suprematist terms. The partially seen bent back of the woodcutter is an arched veil of white against the sized canvas, while the pale mauve diagonal line segment that bisects the composition carries the momentum of the downward cutting axe as did the cutter's arm. Dark rectangles, a pastel pink square and a grey circle all slide in the direction of the cutter's stroke. The action all balances on a truncated grey oval shape resting on the bottom of the canvas, stabilizing the movements and anchoring the composition, pierced as it is by a black vertical bar.

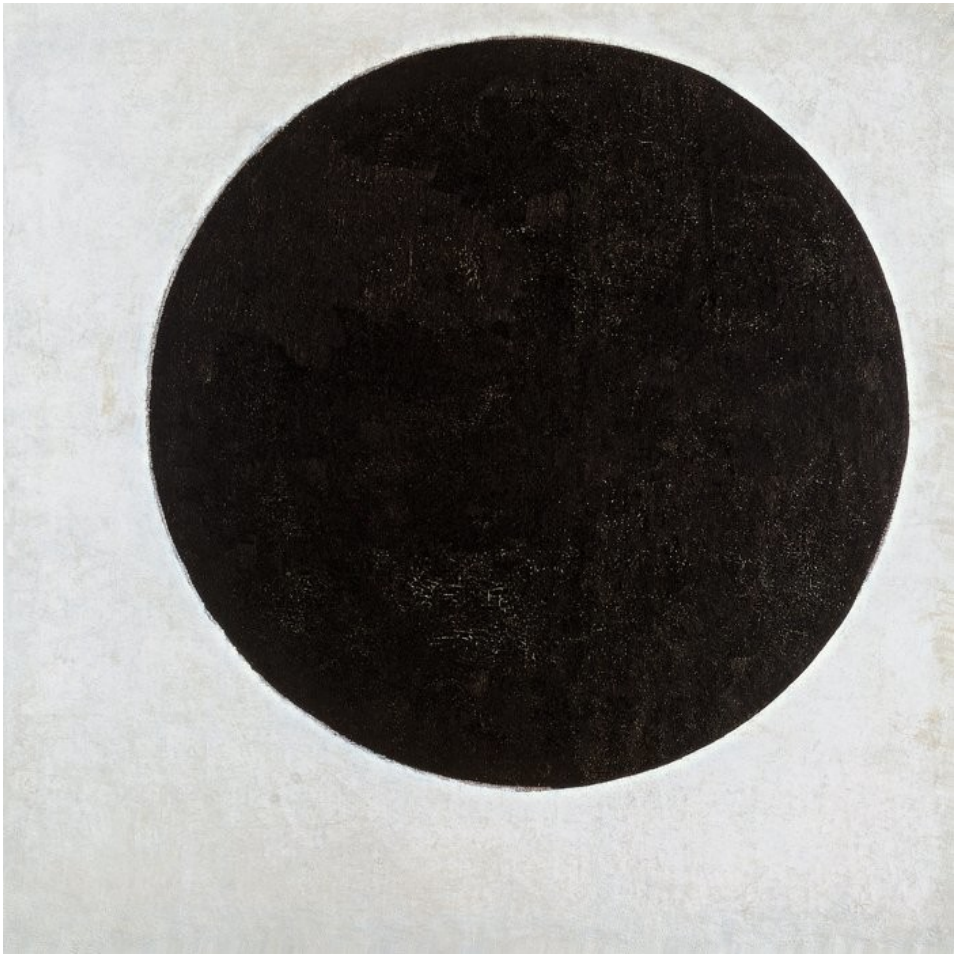
These geometric relationships were created with care and thought as evidenced by a re-drafting of the composition in a 1920 lithograph. In the black and white rendering, value replaces colour in determining the spatial relationship, but the woodcutter becomes a shaded character brought forward towards the viewer and the foreground plane of the canvas. All the other elements are present, but the effect is less spatial.

In 1916 and 1917, Malevich employed his language of geometric shapes upon white canvas as ancient seers once cast runes upon the hearth to read the future in their arrangement. As the runes were thought to be guided by the mystic hand of fate, so did the rectangles, line segments, circles and triangles, the ovals and teardrops find their places at the bristle end of his brushes. And while the solid colours and their pastel equivalents represented moving and static objects without connection to nature's bits and pieces, so did Malevich explore those forces that are invisible and yet act upon the entire cosmos.

Unique in the creative processes, non-objective art offers the ability to give form to "vibes", to the immaterial forces of electrical energy, sound, magnetism the hush of solar wind. In a remarkable series of paintings and drawings, he applied himself to tilting at that fourth dimensional windmill. As the 1917 Russian Revolution erupted in blood and thunder, in storming the palaces, in surging bands of liberated have-nots, in political plots and schemes and in executions and exile of everything Romanov, Kasimir Malevich began exploring space/time.



Suprematist Composition, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 54.2 x 53.7 cm.
Hudozestvennyj Museum, Ivanovo.



Rotation of a Plane, known as *Black Circle*, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 79 x 79 cm. Private Collection.

The Futurists attempted to depict movement in repetition of natural forms almost as a thumb fans the pages of a flip-book to see the silhouette of a man ride a bicycle. Futurists created movement with facets and prisms, as did the Cubists. They chose subjects that existed as movement. The Suprematist was free to codify movement and the relationship of time, to picture the tremble in the force within a static canvas. Photography and cinematography conquered depiction of time and space and would one day "see" magnetism, electrical energy and even the "aura" that surrounds us all, but the painter was bound by the

medium to that static frame locked into visual symbolism regardless of its mystic, philosophical, metaphysical origins in the intellect that steered the brush.

Though Malevich began at the "Zero Form" of the Black Square and then expanded the square into the rectangle which shot out to become the cross and warped in time to achieve the circle, the very solidity of the surface – the living surface to Malevich – locked the tension of the geometric non-object into a single plane. He explored the twisting of a geometric shape as in *Suprematism No. 55 (Spheric Evolution of a Plane)* to achieve an object that sweeps into a terminated distance from its static rest.

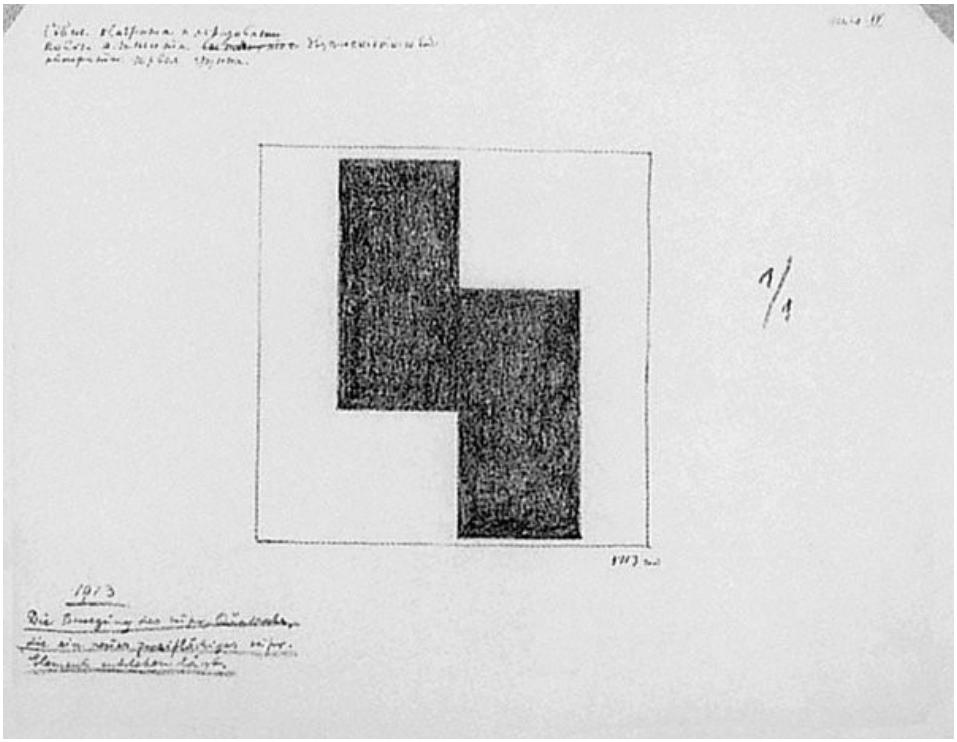
But it was within the shaded or dissolving shape that he achieved his symbol, *Dissolution of a Plane*, painted in 1917, is an early example of this exploration. A tilted carmine-red rectangle fills the 52 x 30 inch canvas and its long right edge is dissolving into the infinite white of the background. In itself, a dissolving plane is not unusual; Malevich used dissolving surfaces in his Cubist works such as *Samovar* in 1913. He shaded his metallic surfaces in the *Morning After a Storm in the Country* in 1912. In *Dissolution*, however, the intent is not to feature the nature of the surface, but to demonstrate the vanishing of solidity into the ethereal whiteness of infinity.

He had demonstrated his experiments with the fourth dimension in 1915 with simple shape paintings such as Painterly Realism. Boy with Knapsack - Colour Masses in the Fourth Dimension featuring a black square and a smaller tilted red square against white. In *Suprematist Painting: Black Rectangle, Blue Triangle*, the blue triangle has clearly penetrated the rectangle above it – the blue triangle point does not resonate above the black rectangle, but lies within it. Another 1915 introduction to the fourth dimension was Suprematist Composition with a Plane in Projection. Here the bottom of a yellow-orange square has tilted back (key stoned) from the surface that is marked with a black and a blue rectangle pressed together.

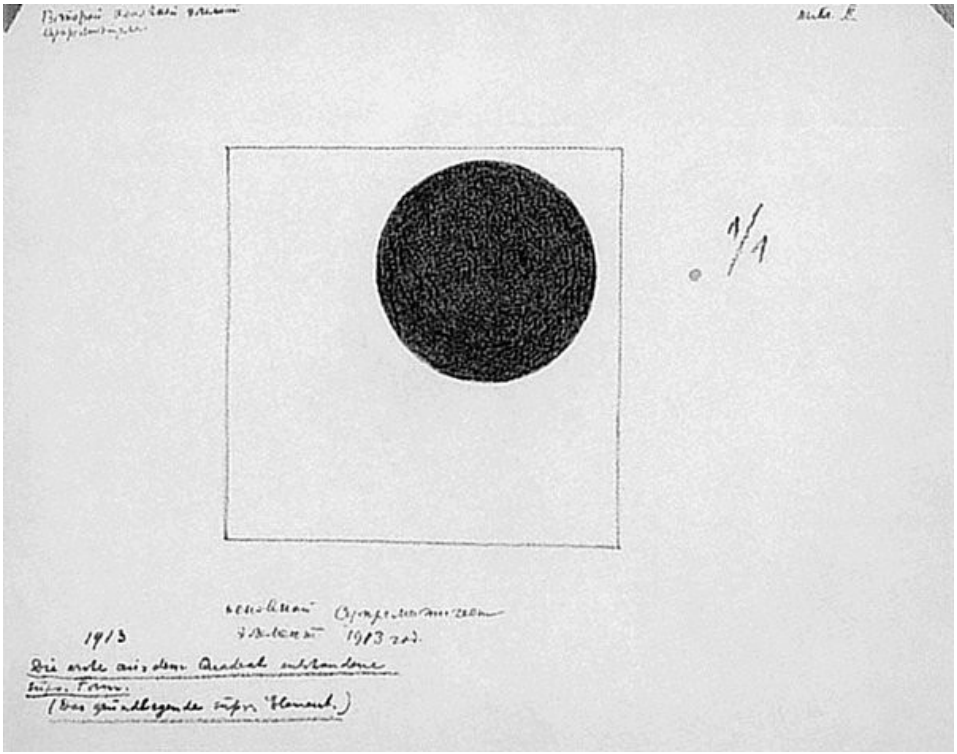
By 1916, Malevich had begun sketches showing three arcs, all shaded from the outside circumference to the inside circumference and penetrated at their centres by a shaded rectangle – shaded left to right edge. He titled this *Suprematist Composition, white in white, expressing the feeling of fading away.* In 1918 he repeated this three shaded-arcs skewered on a shaded shaft concept in white on pale beige, but as *Untitled (Suprematist Painting)*. The feeling of the work is less "fading away" as it is "dissolving" – radiating into space. Today, the painting

could be displayed upside down and it would resemble microwave towers passing communication radio waves that were unknown in 1918.

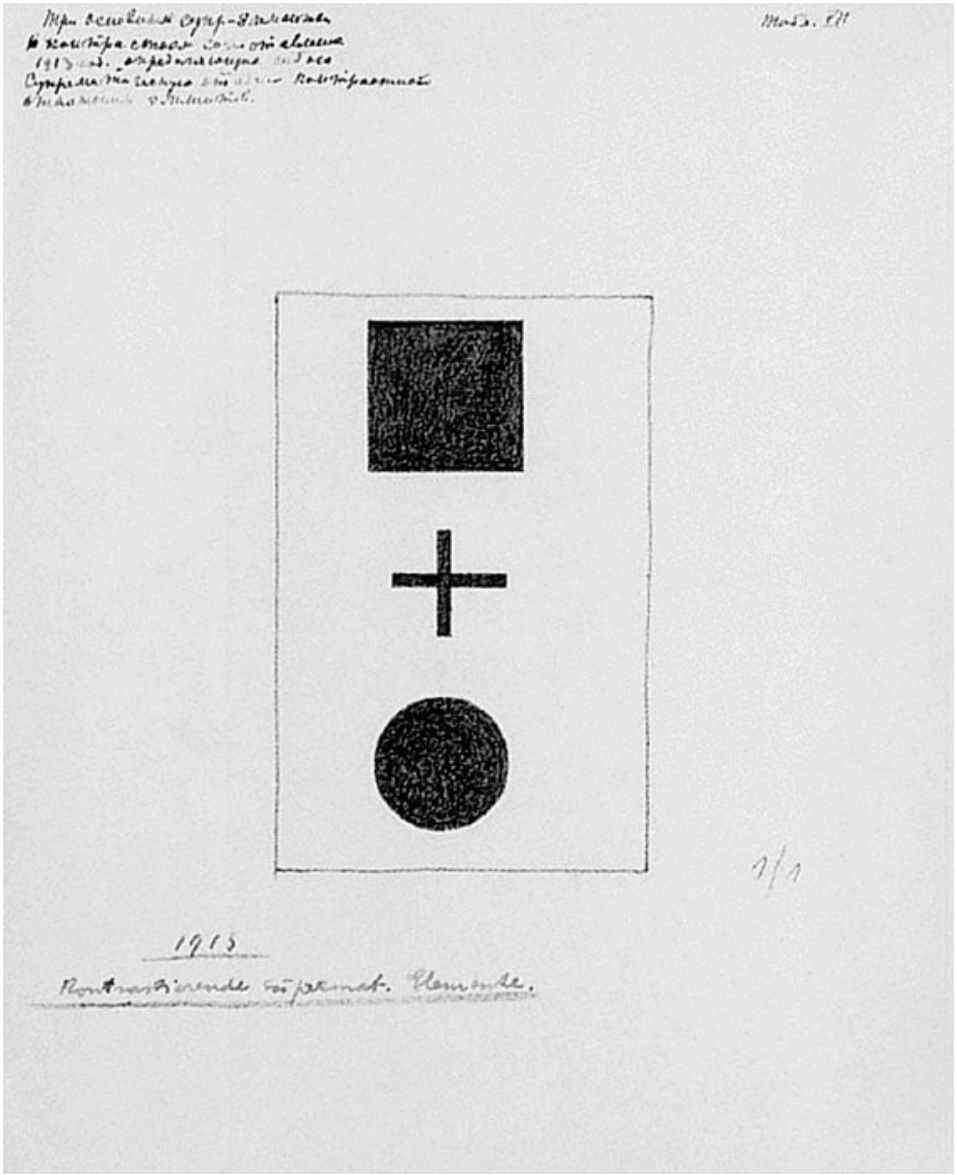
During this 1917-18 period, as the world in which he had grown up collapsed around him in the streets, on the floor of the Duma, in the forests and steppes where Germans shot at Russians and Russians shot at Russians; as the former ruling classes fled for the borders to find sanctuary, Kasimir Malevich passed into the fourth dimension where the bullets couldn't find him.



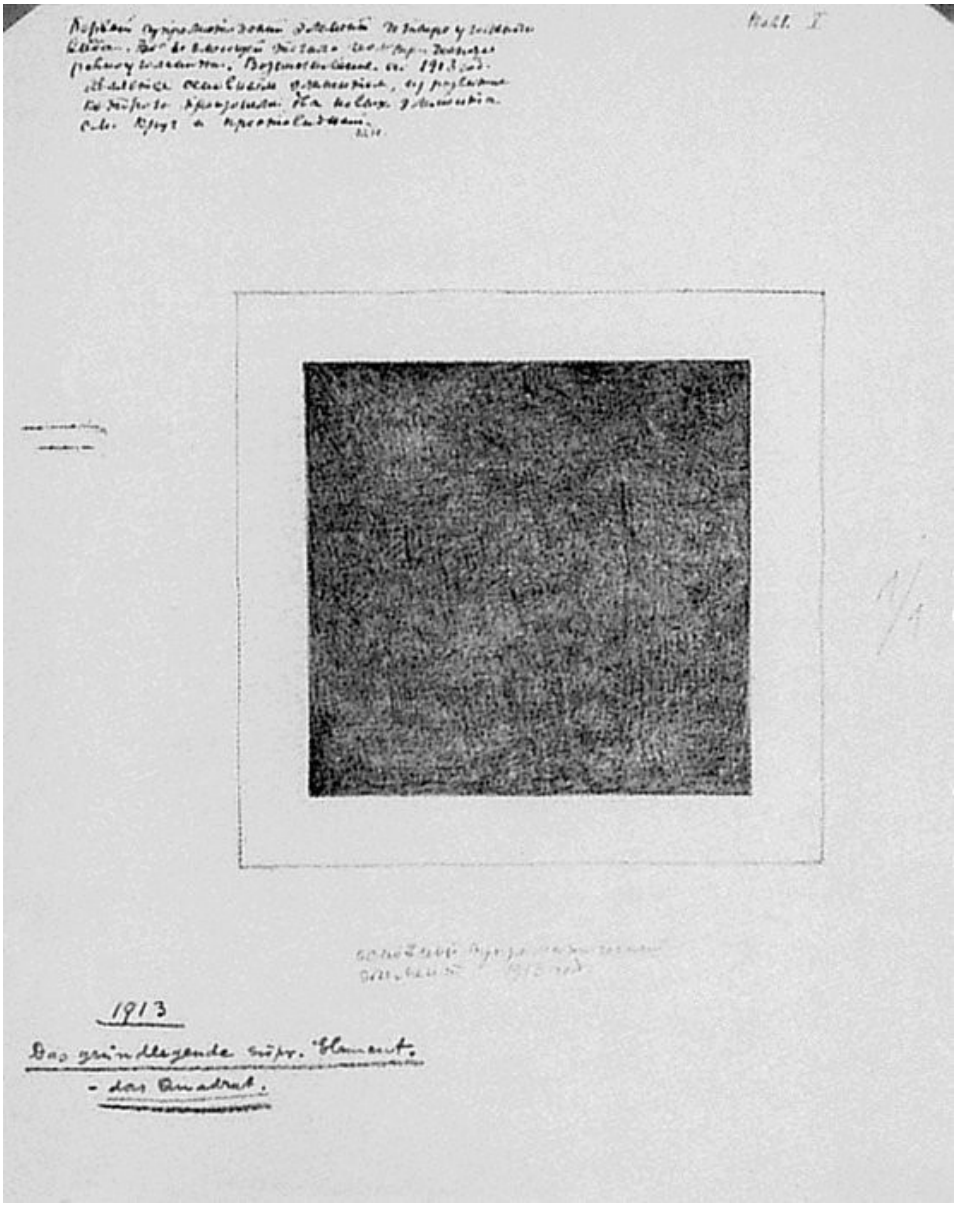
The Movement of a Suprematist Square producing a New Biplanar Suprematist Element (Two Parallel Joined Rectangles), motif: 1915, version: 1927.
Pencil on paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 11.1 x 11 cm, size of sheet: 20.5 x 26.5 cm.



The Basic Suprematist Element: the First Suprematist Form to Develop out of the Square (the Circle),
motif: 1915, version: 1927. Pencil on paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 10.8 x 10.9 cm, size of sheet: 20.5 x 26.5 cm.



Contrasting Suprematist Elements (Square, Cross, Circle in Vertical Composition), motif: 1915, version: 1927.
Pencil on paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 10.2 x 6.4 cm, size of sheet: 20.9 x 16.4 cm.



The Basic Suprematist Element: the Square, motif: 1915, version: 1927.
Pencil on paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 12.5 x 12.5 cm, size of sheet: 26.5 x 21.5 cm.

Two Suprematist Planes in Orthogonal Relations, known as *Black Cross*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm. Musée national d'Art moderne, centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

While Malevich pushed his Suprematist theories and visualizations into the Russian art world, he was not the only non-objective painter looking for wall space. Alexandre Mikhailovich Rodchenko (1891-1956) was a painter, sculptor, photographer and industrial designer who flowered in war-time Russia. After considerable study, he met Vladimir Tatlin in 1916. Through this introduction, Tatlin passed him along through the cream of Russia's avant-garde, including the poet Vladimir

Mayakovsky, painters Liuboy Popova, Kasimir Malevich and Rodchenko's future wife, Varvara Stepanova. That same year, he was invited to hang alongside Tatlin and Malevich at the *Magazin* (The Store) Exhibition in Moscow. The early Constructivist works by Tatlin and Malevich's Suprematist paintings convinced Rodchenko to abandon his subjective approach to art and recast his feelings for design, colour and composition into abstract geometric shapes.

The work of the two painters, though translated through geometric shapes in limbo, were vastly different in concept and ideology. Rodchenko also experimented with Cubist and Futurist ideas prior to even more abstract results, but he gradually developed his creative goals through a political filter. To Rodchenko, art had to have a purpose, a utilitarian function – not unlike the later Bauhaus Group philosophy – and his maths, physics and design studies served to make each painting a scientific method for revealing reality. He diverged sharply from Malevich's mystic spirituality and windy manifestos.

As Malevich and Kandinsky's works seemed to avoid reality and veered into the metaphysical, Rodchenko saw his creations as tools for social change and reform. These leftist objectives were well in line with the new regime that followed the Revolution. He saw the artist's role in society as that of a catalyst for change with an opportunity to educate the masses in a progressive society. In 1921 he and Kandinsky formed the Institute of Artistic Culture in Moscow, but Kandinsky soon split away from the utilitarian aspect of the institute's curriculum. Rodchenko renounced easel painting and devoted his art to design and metalwork.

Malevich had no desire to use his art like a hammer and nails. He had learned the mystical roots of his art from "the masses" and now trusted the public to eventually see the need for Suprematist paintings. In his Manifesto he wrote:

"Art values – in the present case the aesthetic arrangement of the forms and colours on the picture plane – are essentially imperishable and immeasurable because they are timeless. The public, to be sure, evaluates works of art (pictures) on the basis of external characteristics which are in accord with the "familiar" – the approved – on the basis of subject matter, the fidelity to "nature" of the thing depicted, etc.

If then, a picture displays new additional elements so that it is no longer possible to fit it into the framework of the familiar norm, it is rejected by the public. .. The public's lack of understanding however does not alter in the slightest the actual artistic value of the picture so that when, after a certain lapse of time, the people have accustomed

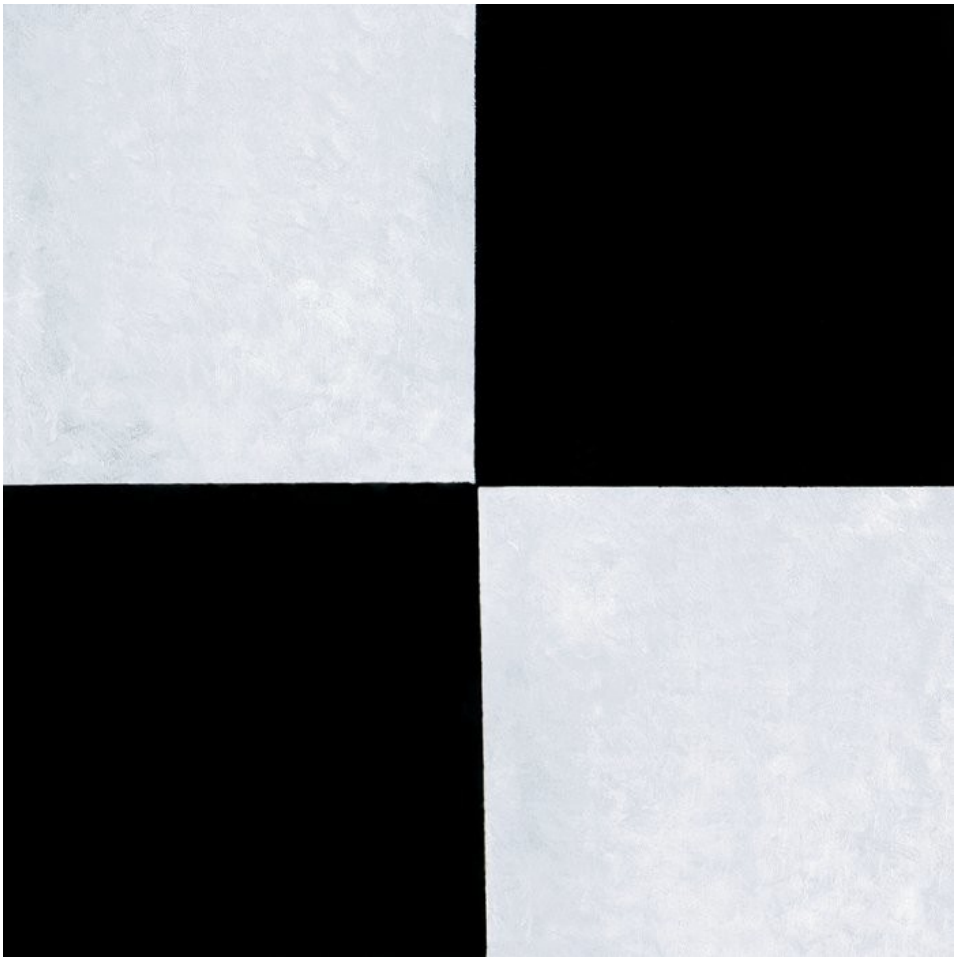
themselves to the unfamiliar, the picture will eventually come into its own."

Considering this conflict between the utility of art and its intellectual goals in Russian society of the period, V.V. Maliavin of the Institute of Russian & Slavic Studies wrote:

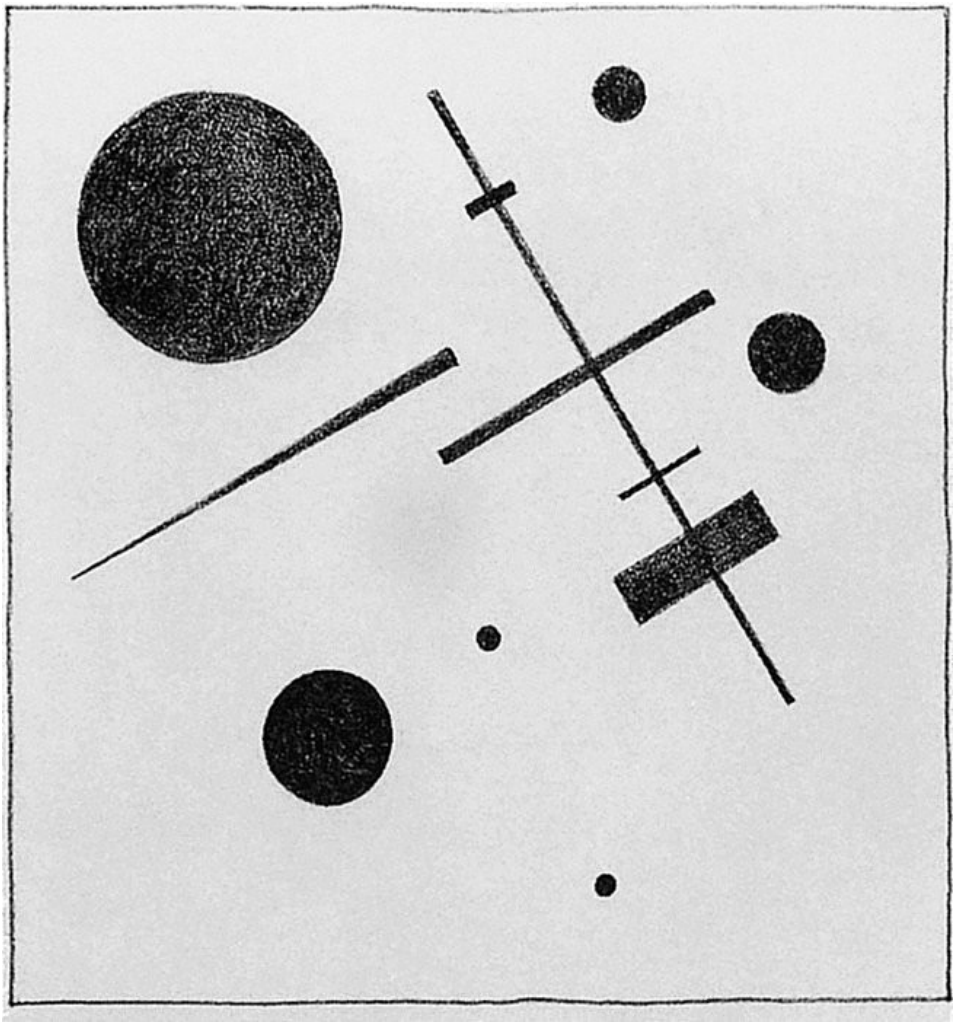
"In the final account, the technological system brings about the relation of humankind to the totality of being, a sort of pure, or absolute activity forever upgrading itself. Russia's leading avant-garde artist K. Malevich pushed this line of thinking to its logical end when he declared, writing in 1919: "By my new being I put an end to the wasting of rational energy and bring to standstill the life of the green animal world. Everything will be directed towards the unity of mankind's skull as a perfect tool of nature's culture."[25]

[25] V.V. Maliavin, *Russia, Modernity and Globalization - The Making and Unmaking of Modernity*, Institute of Russian & Slavic Studies, Tamkang University, Taiwan, R.O.C.

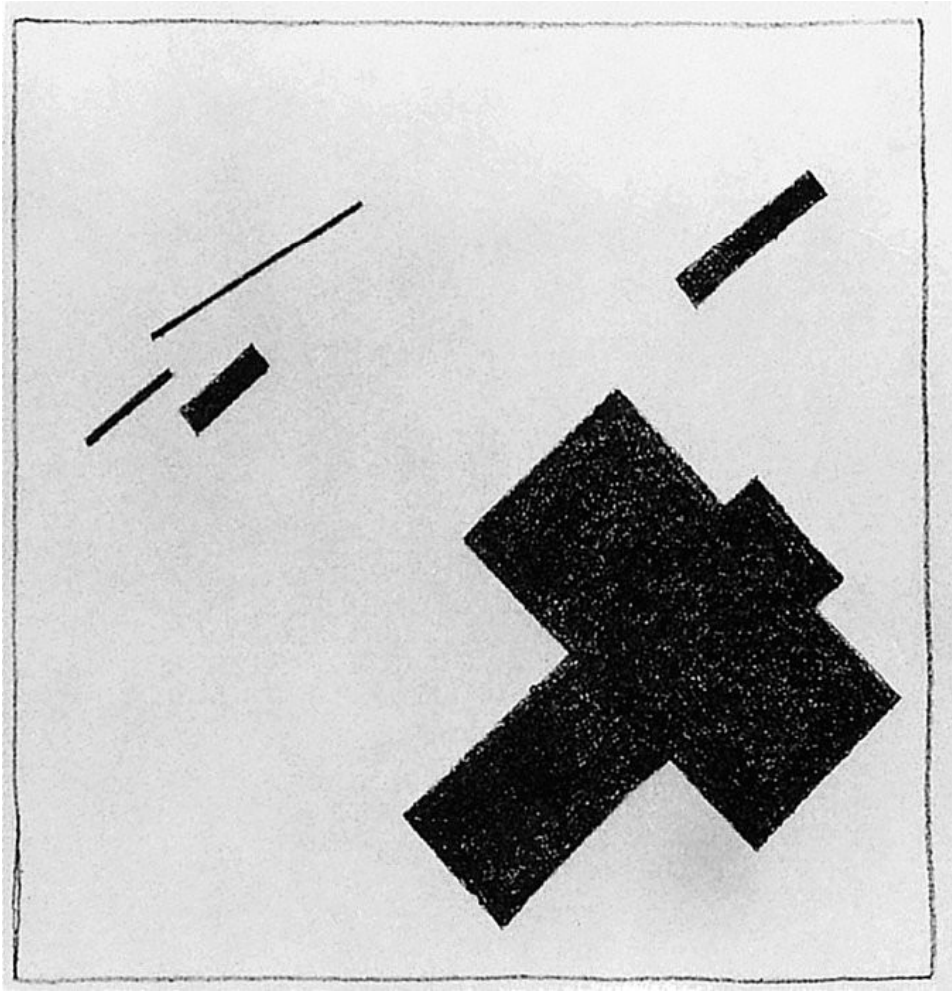
Extension of a Plane, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm. Private Collection.



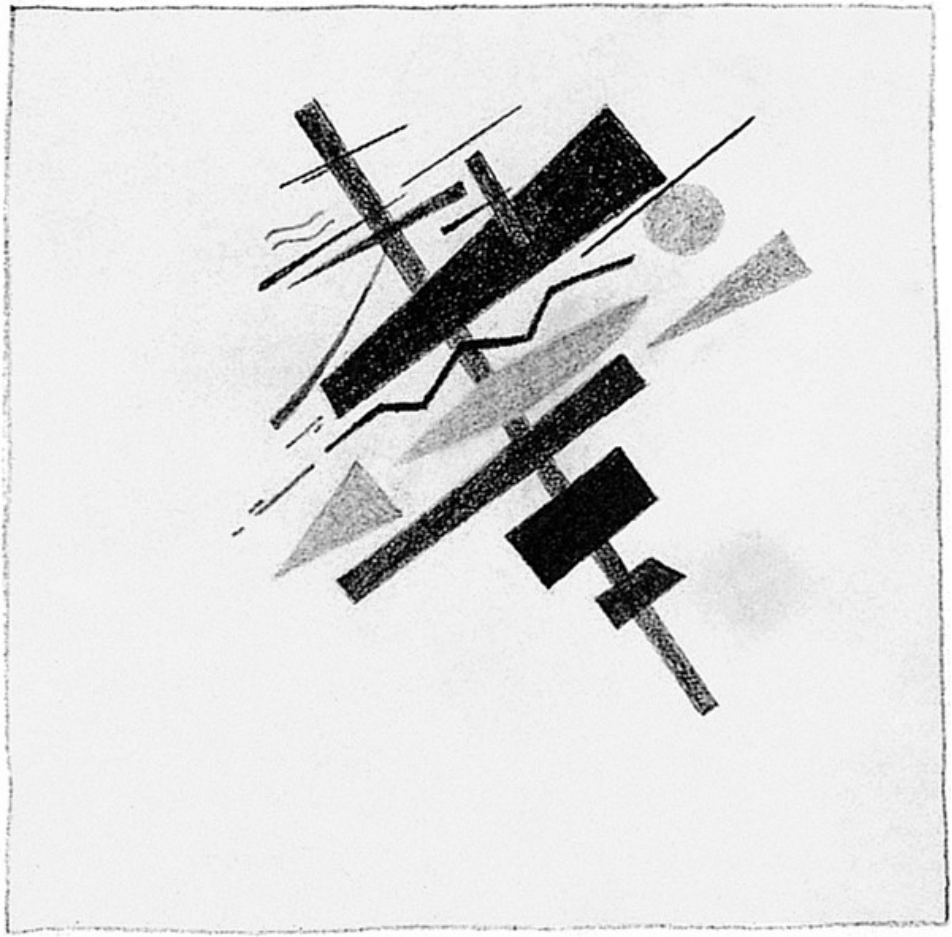
Division of a Plane in Four Parts, 1915. Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm. Museum of Fine Arts A. N. Radiscev, Saratov.



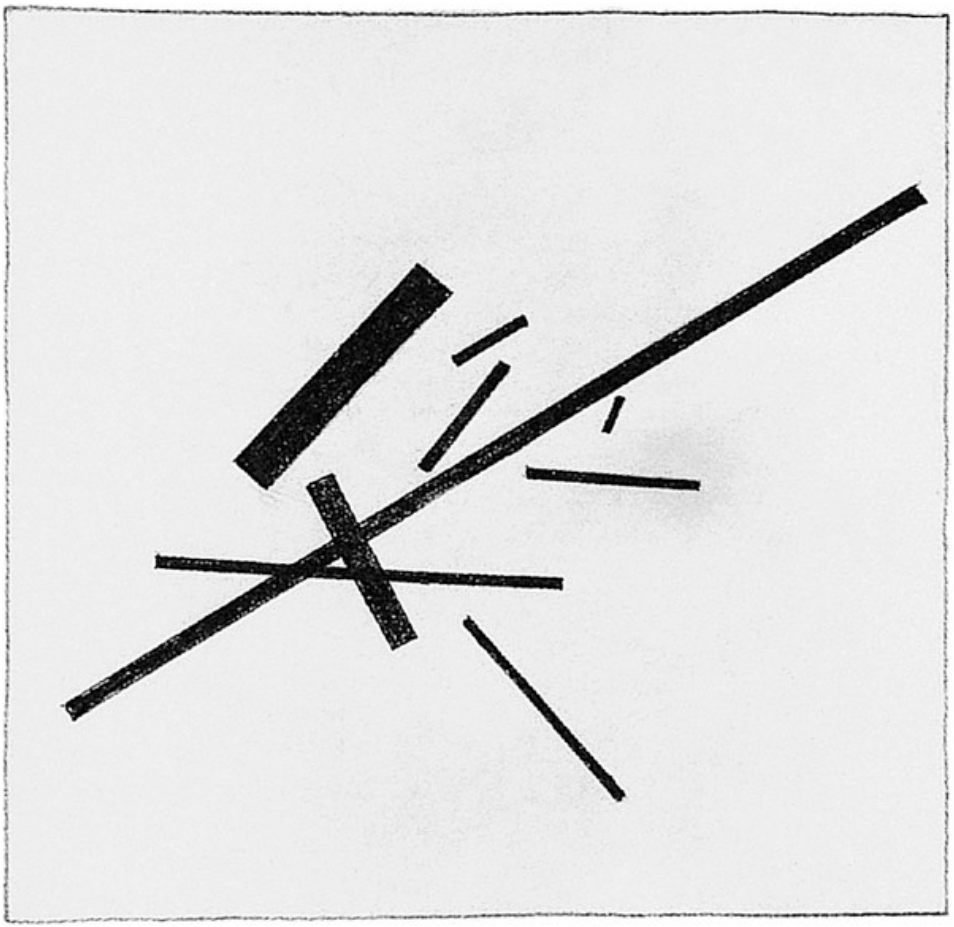
Suprematist Composition Expressing the Combined Feeling of the Circle and the Square, c. 1920. Pencil on paper, 20.5 x 26.5 cm. Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



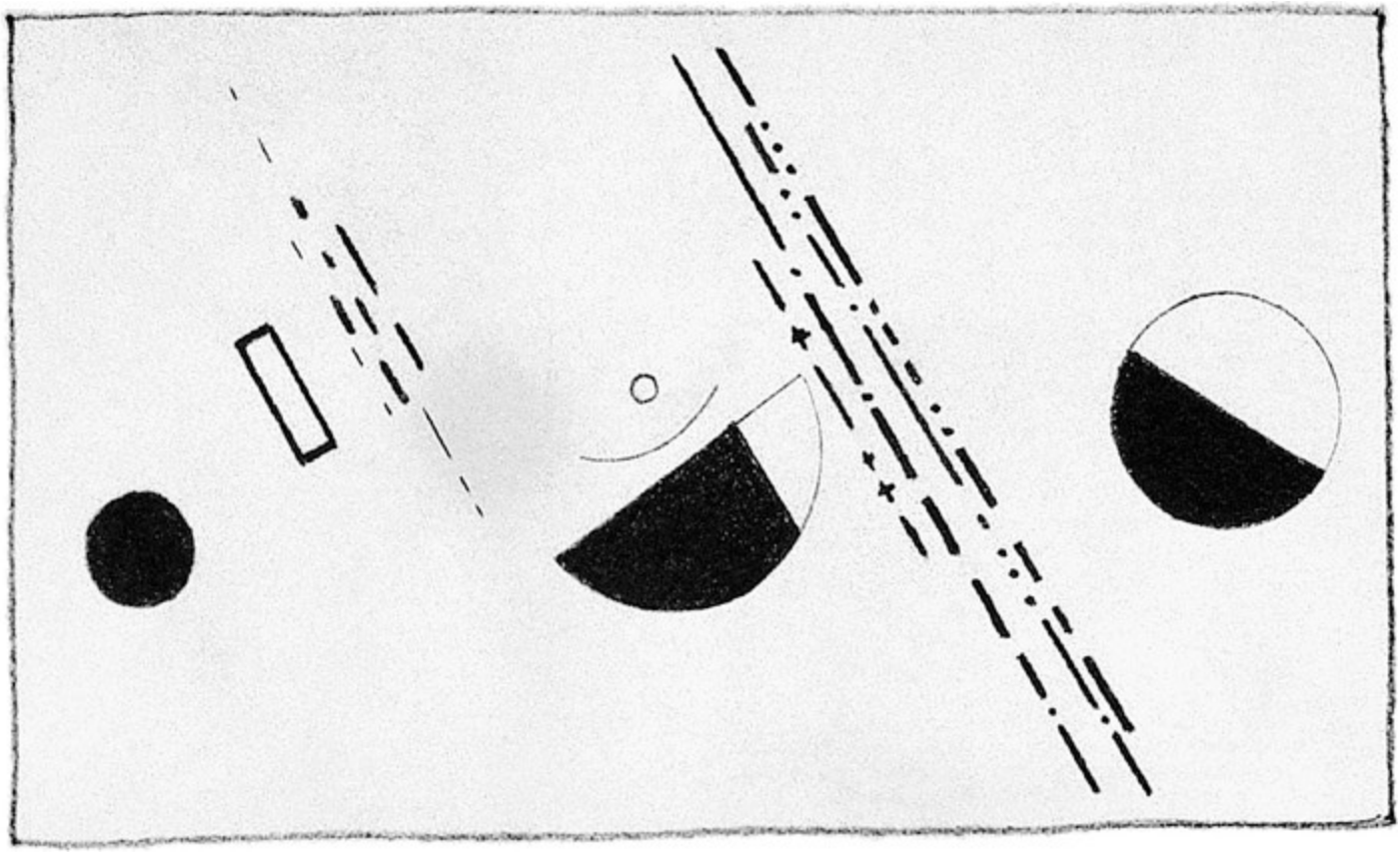
Composition of Suprematist Elements Expressing the Sensation of Flight, c. 1920. Pencil on paper, 21 x 16.4 cm. Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



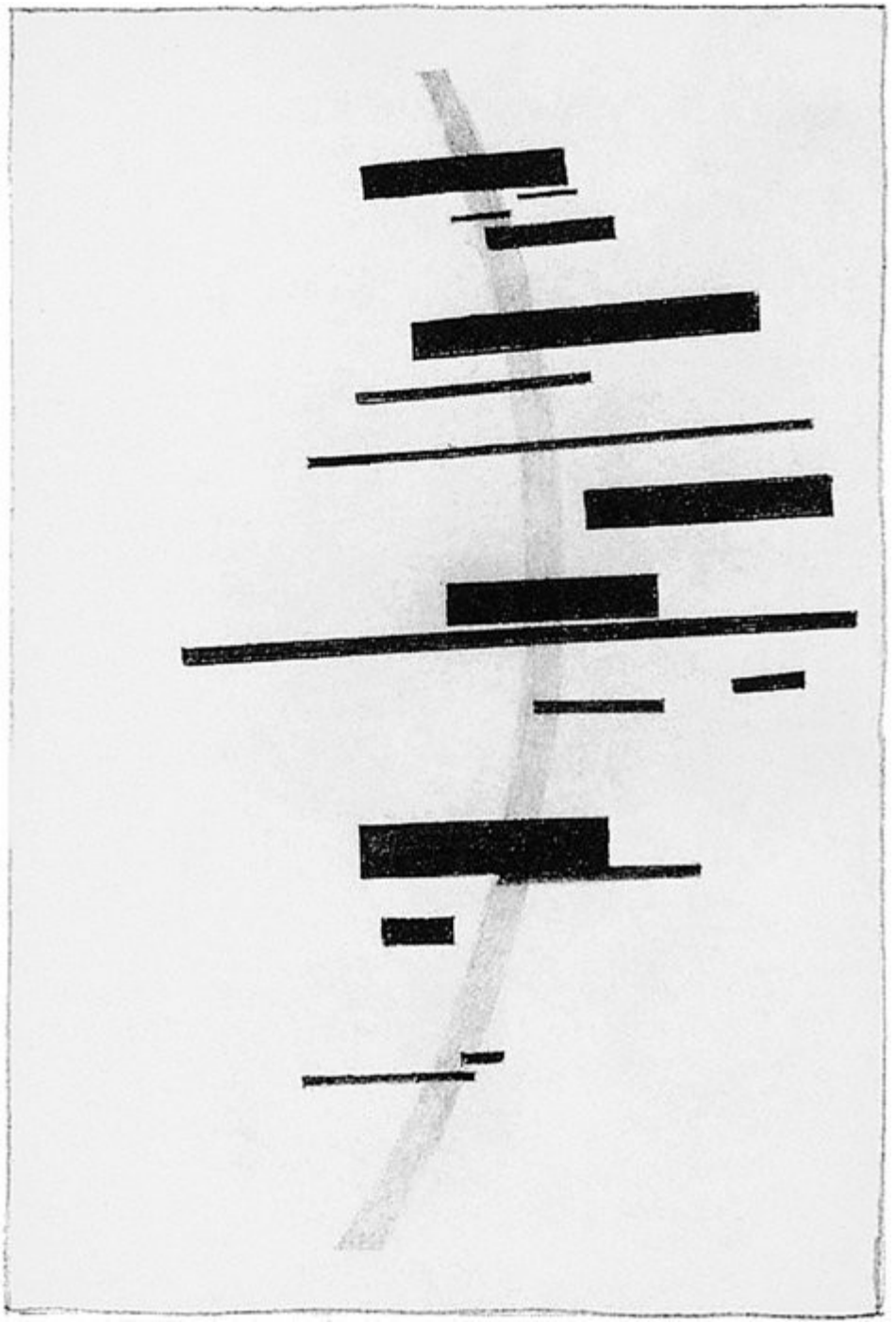
Composition of Combined Suprematist Elements Expressing the Sensation of Metallic Sounds – Dynamic (Pale, Metallic Colours), c. 1920. Pencil on paper, 20.9 x 16.4 cm. Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



Suprematist Composition
Expressing Magnetic Attraction, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 26.5 x 20.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.

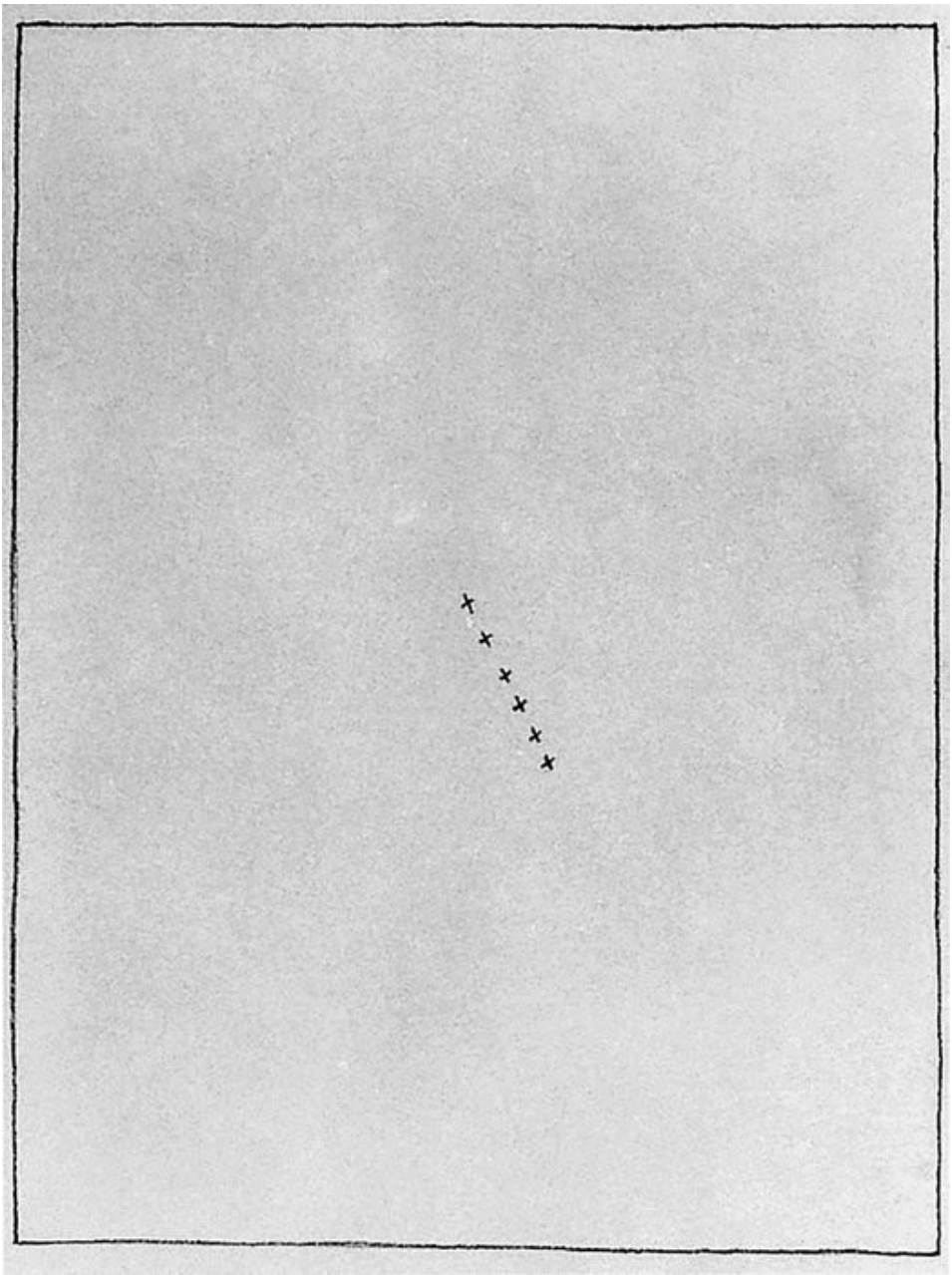


Suprematist Composition Expressing the Feeling of Wireless Telegraphy, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 20.9 x 16.4 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.

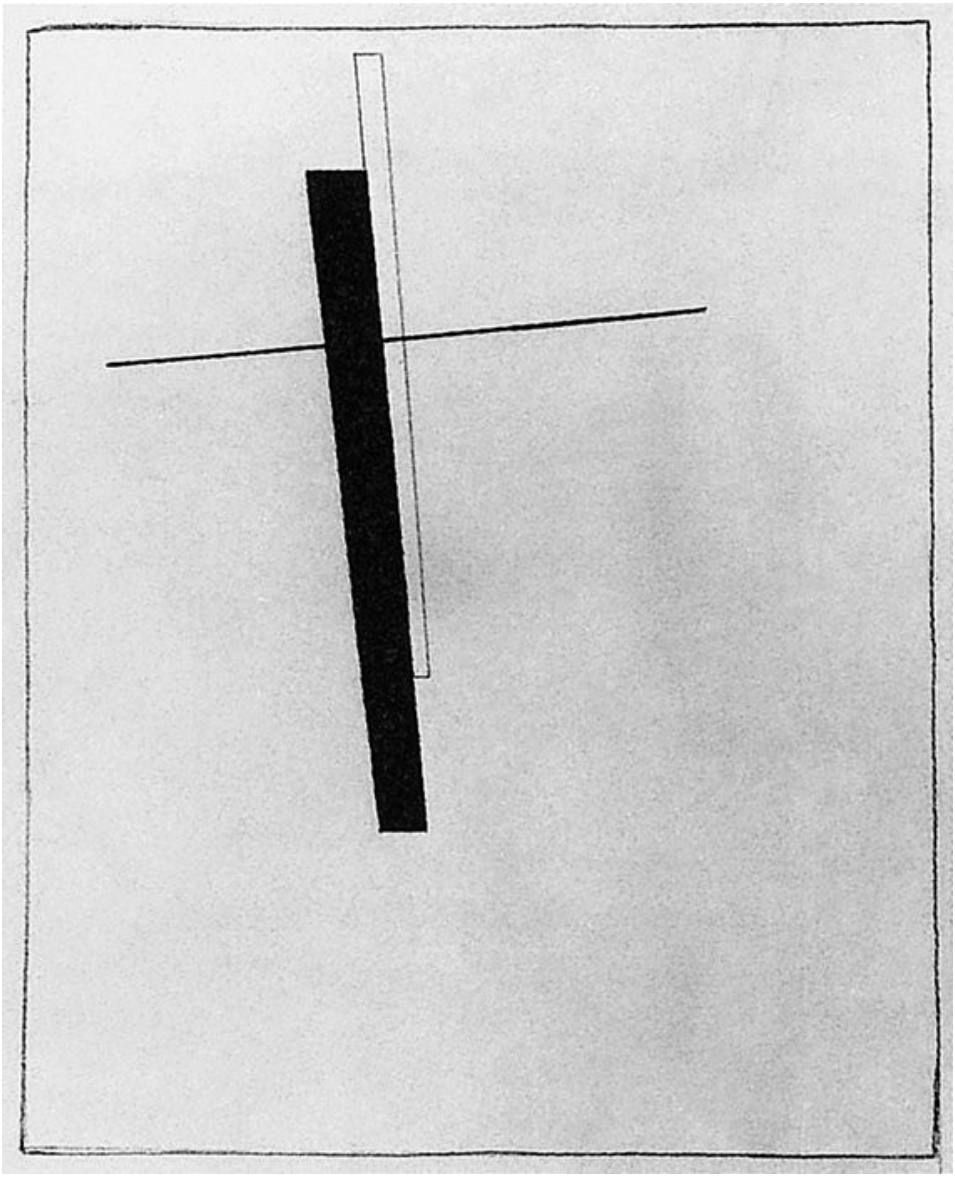


Suprematist Composition Conveying the Feeling of Movement and Resistance, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 26.5 x 20.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.

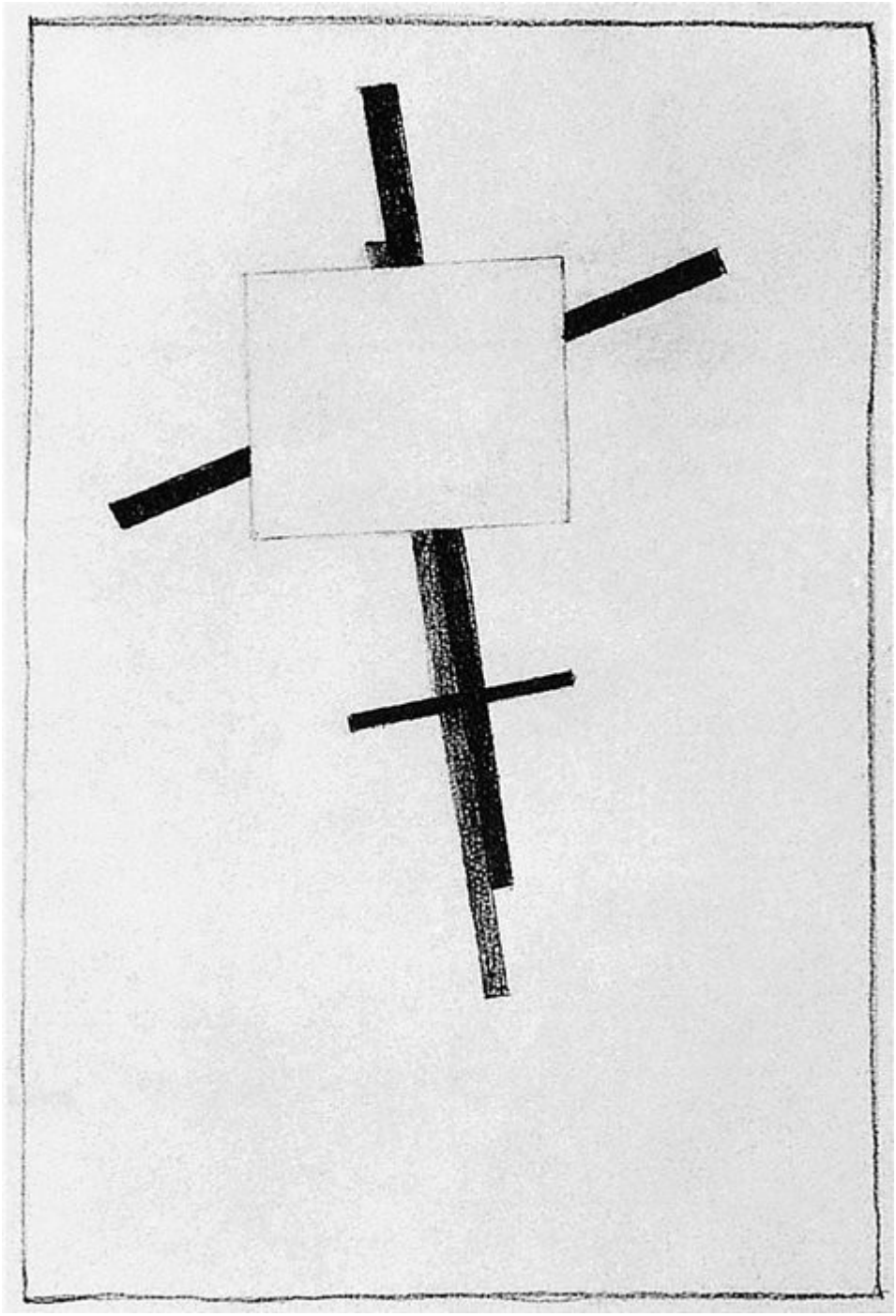
Suprematist Composition Conveying a Sense of the Universe, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 20.5 x 26.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



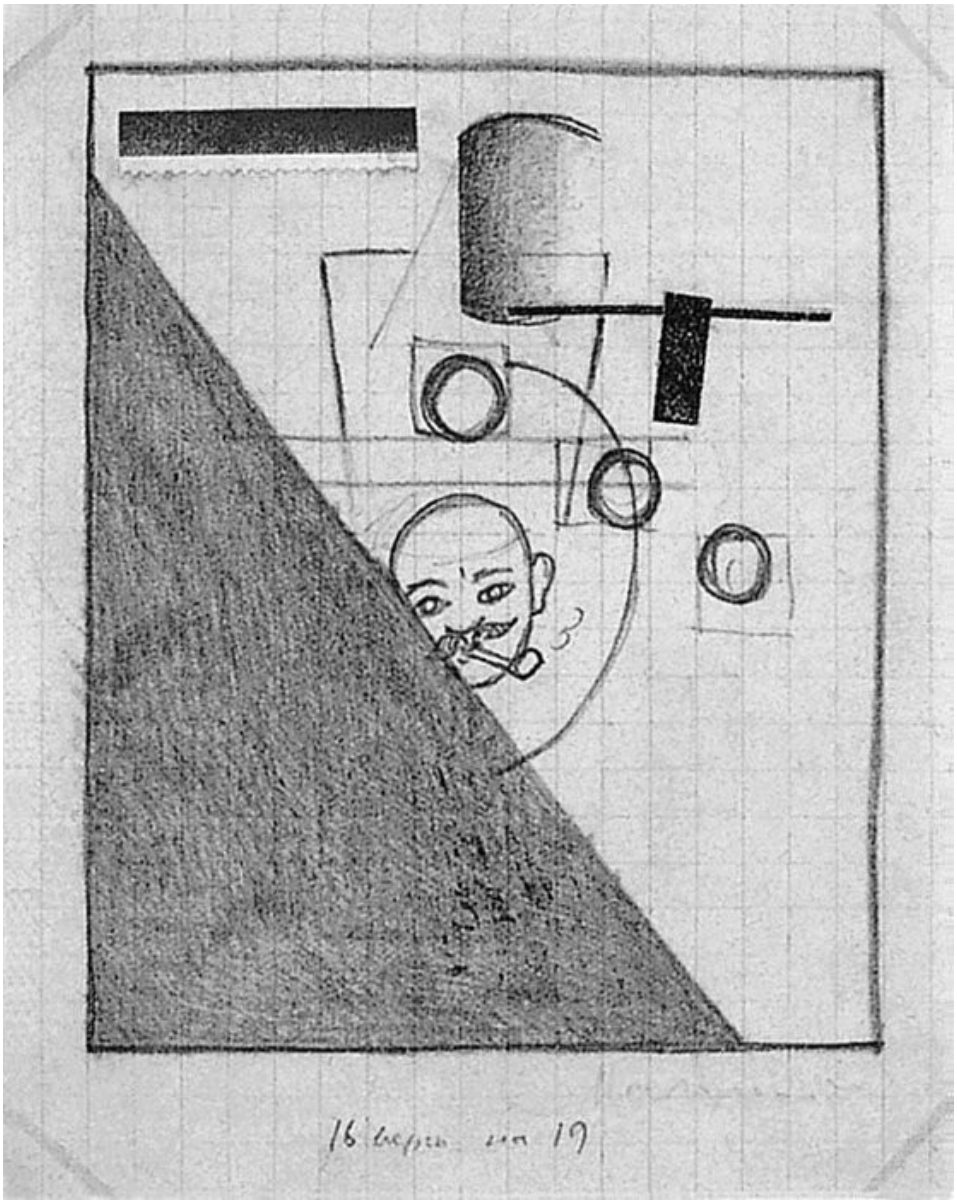
Suprematist Composition Conveying a Feeling of Universal Space, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 20.5 x 26.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



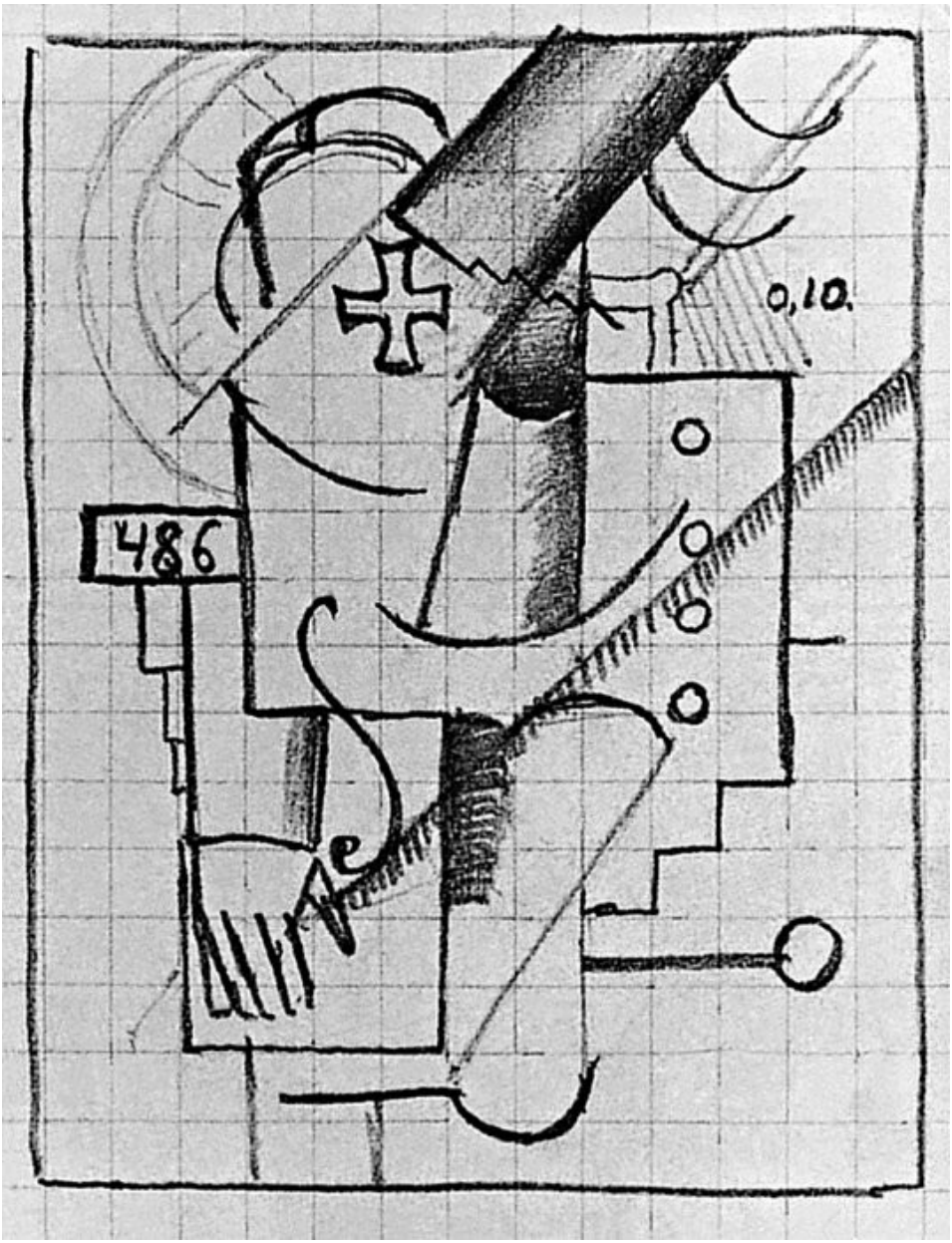
Suprematist Composition Conveying the Feeling of a Mystic "Wave" from Outer Space, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 26.5 x 20.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



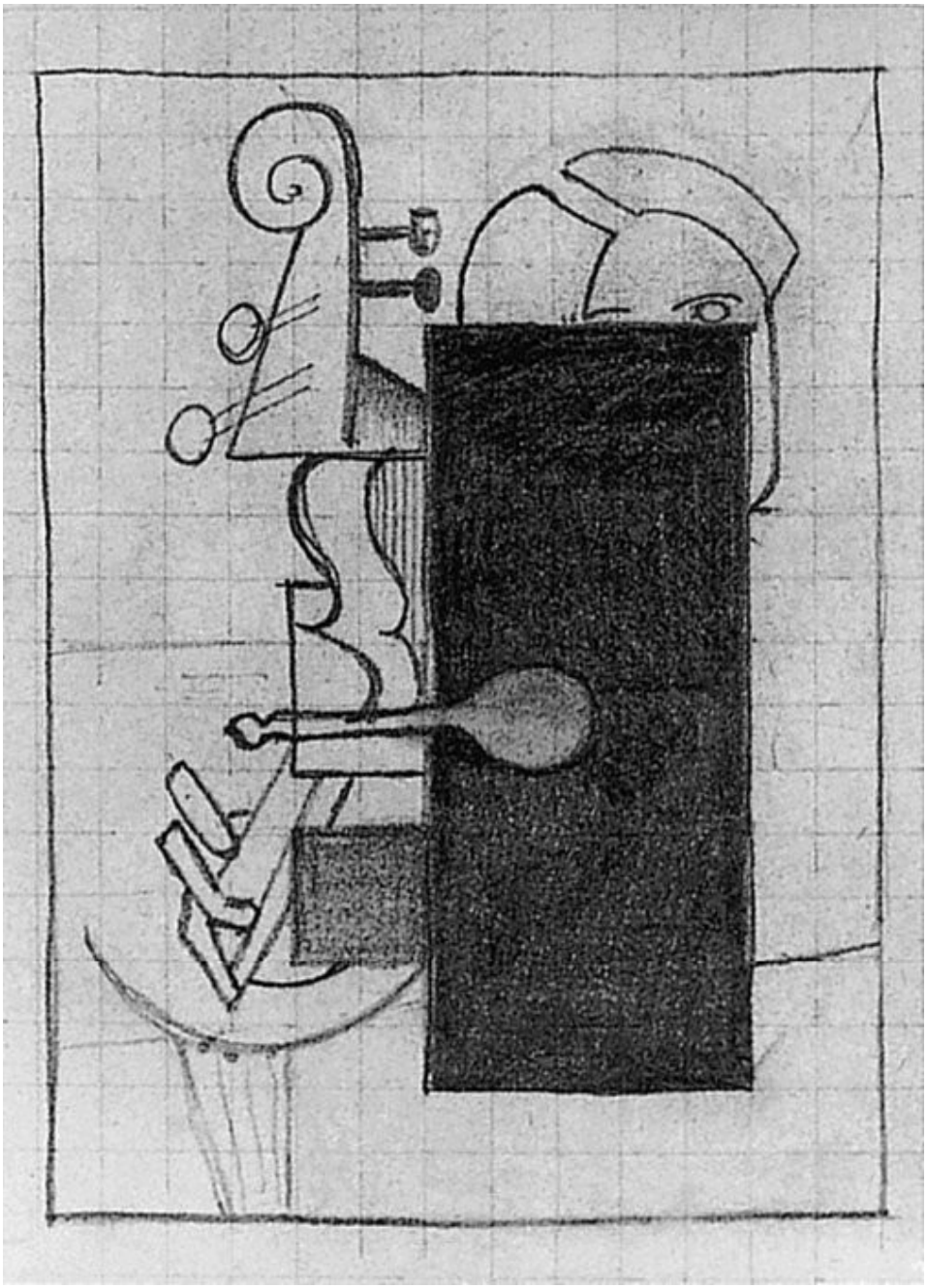
Suprematist Composition Conveying the Feeling of a Mystic Will: Unwelcome, c. 1920.
Pencil on paper, 26.5 x 20.5 cm.
Öffentliche Kunstmuseum, Basel.



Alogical Composition: Man Smoking a Pipe, 1913. Pencil and collage on graph paper, size of image as defined by Malevich: 10.5 x 8.5 cm, size of sheet: 12.8 x 10.1 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



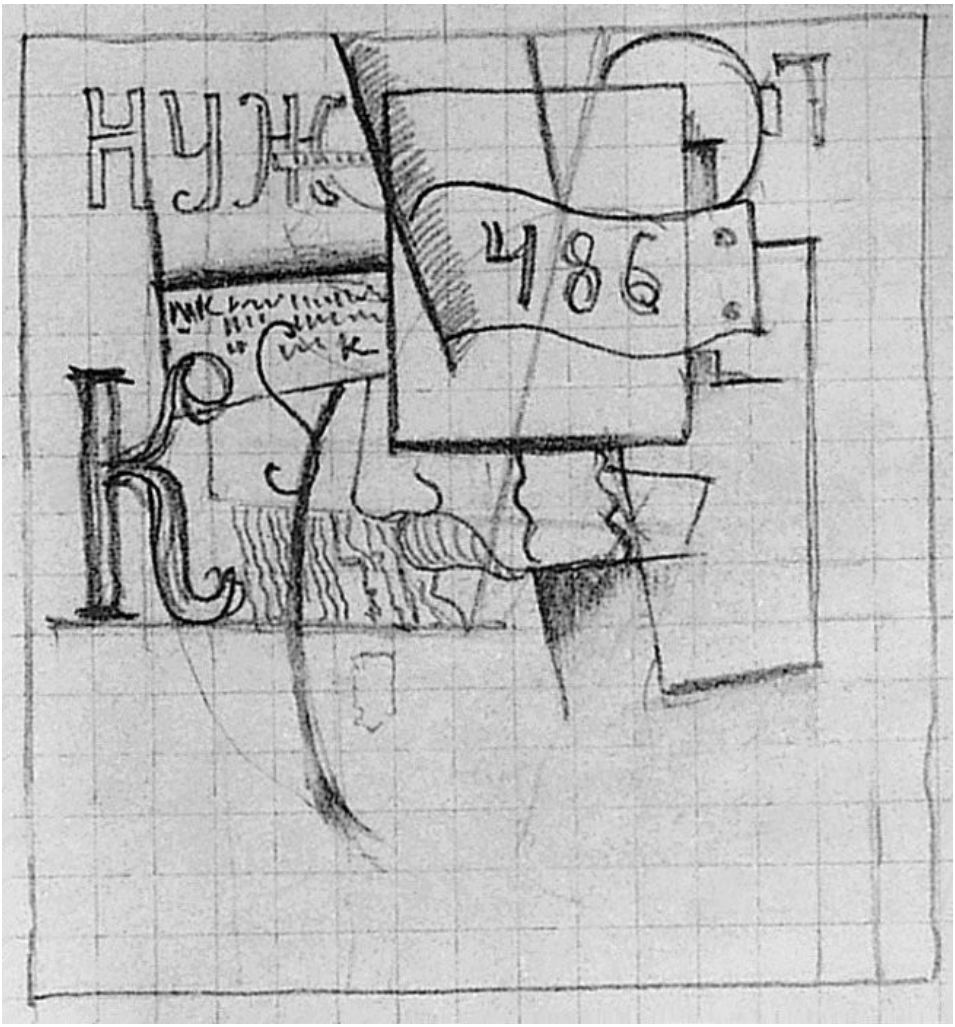
Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined
by Malevich: 9 x 6.5 cm, size of sheet: 16.4 x 11.2 cm.



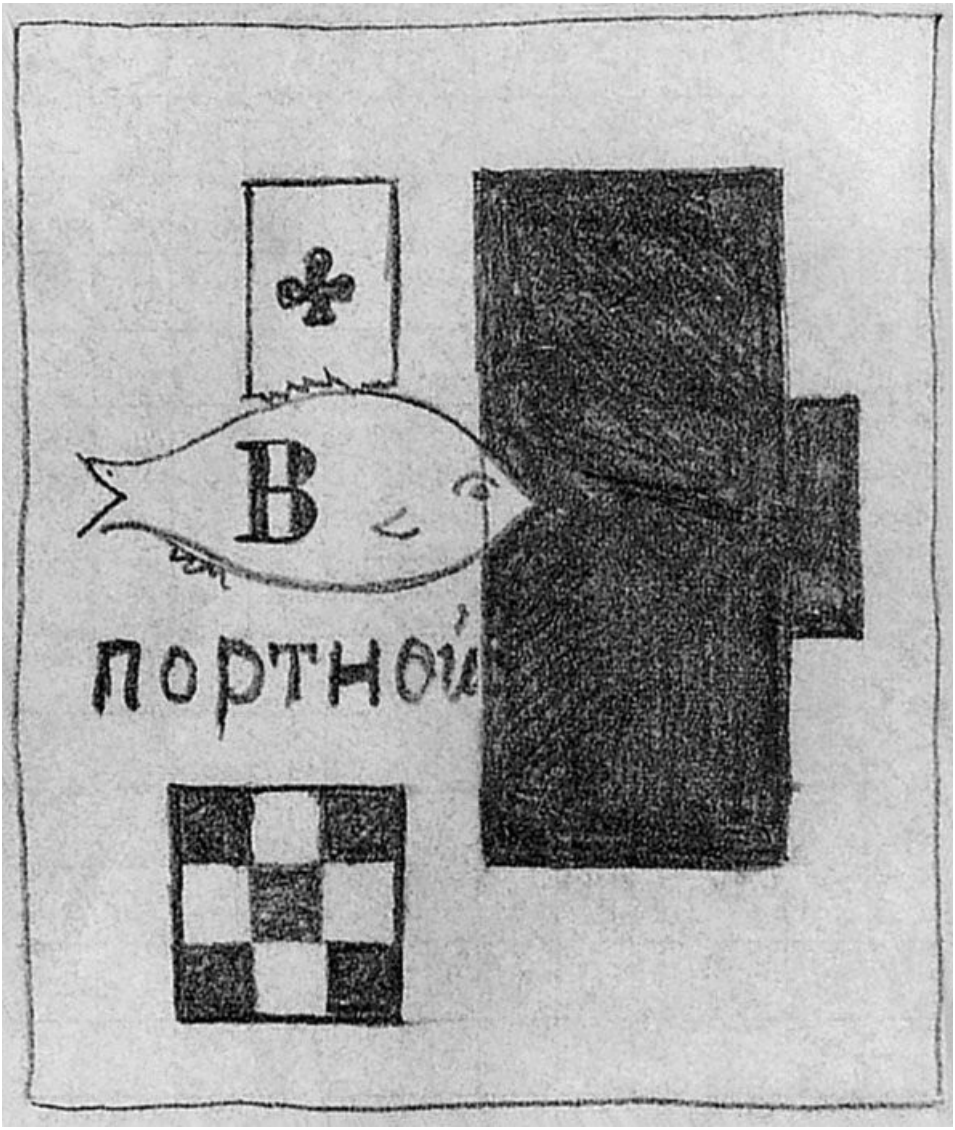
Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined

by Malevich: 8.5 x 6.6 cm, size of sheet: 16.4 x 11.2 cm.

Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined
by Malevich: 7 x 5.8 cm, size of sheet: 16 x 11 cm.



Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined
by Malevich: 8 x 7.6 cm, size of sheet: 16.5 x 11.2 cm.



Alogical Composition, 1915.
Pencil on graph paper, size of image as defined
by Malevich: 8.1 x 6 cm, size of sheet: 16.6 x 11.2 cm.

Malevich's friend, the composer Nicolai Roslavits wrote: "In liberating himself from the power of the representational, the artist liberates art from the last fetters that have thus far prevented it from

manifesting its true essence. And with the liberation of art will come crashing down all the fortresses of scholastic dogmatism erected by the bustling labour of the so-called 'science of beauty' – aesthetics – because it is the object from which all its tenets were derived and upon which it was built; not only did 'things vanish like smoke' from the artist's field of vision, gone like smoke as well were the rotten foundations upon which they were based over entire centuries."[26]

Not quite all the "rotten foundations" vanish in Malevich's pronounced pillars or "prisms" of twentieth-century art. He stated that they reside in the works of Pablo Picasso and the Futurist gadfly, Emilio Angelo Carlo Marinetti, who signed his work "Filippo Tommaso Marinetti." Picasso's place in Malevich's elite pantheon may be understood, but Marinetti adds a baffling spice to the concoction.

After abandoning the study of law, Marinetti immersed himself in literary life until one day in 1908 while "speeding" in an automobile along a back road near Milan, he swerved to avoid two cyclists and ploughed into a ditch. He emerged from the ditch smudged with mud, a bump on the head, clad in the mantle of a manifesto-spouting Futurist. This epiphany, *The Futurist Manifesto*, was published on 20th February 1909 on the front page (due no doubt to family/political connections) of the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*. In it he declared, "Art [...] can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice."

His modest proposal also explains that the past must be disposed of and his followers must "destroy the museums, the libraries, every type of academy" and sing of "the great crowds, shaken by work, by pleasure or by rioting, glorify war – the only hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of liberators, the beautiful ideas for which one dies, and contempt for women." Almost in (goose-)step with Fascism, Marinetti was a whirlwind of Futurist motion as he plunged into the arts.

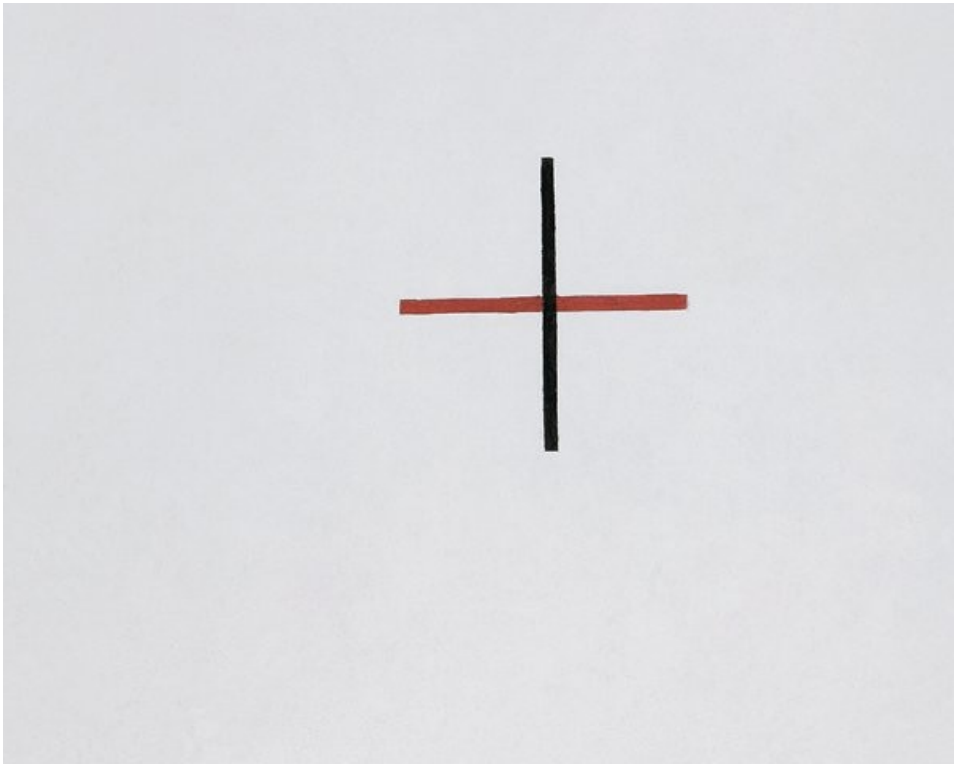
As great minds and babbling incendiaries alike debated his manifesto, Marinetti opened *The Feasting King* (Le Roi Bombance) in April1909 to burst of derision and heckling from the audience. Loudest of the hecklers was Marinetti himself, who considered such derision part of his creative Futurist goals. Still later, this "pillar" sited by Malevich was fortunate to have his first novel *Mafarka Il Futurista* cleared in court of all obscenity charges. After roping in three painters, Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo and Carlo Carra, he launched a series of *Futurist Evenings* where manifestos were proclaimed in front of mobs armed with new mud and old fruit.

By 1911 his warmongering mettle was tested as he went off to report the Italo-Turkish War as a newspaper correspondent. On returning, he published an anti-Austrian, anti-Catholic novel in verse titled *The Pope's Aeroplane* and then dismissed syntax altogether in a number of sound poems with titles such as *Zang Tumb Tumb* which he later recorded in 1935, firing off bursts of words for their velocity and impact on the ear in his richly fruity Italian rolled 'r's.

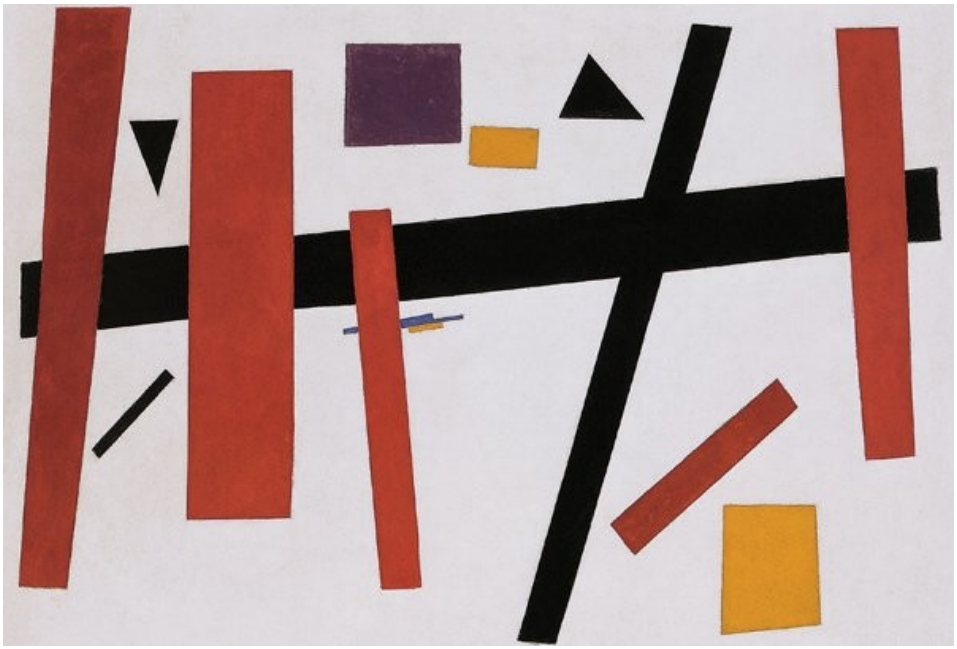
In a Nietzschean paean, Malevich clasped this eccentric to his bosom in a 1923 unpublished essay. "Marinetti and I spent our childhood and youth at the summit of Mount Etna; we only spoke to the devils that appeared in Etna's smoke. We were mystics then, but the devils always tempted us with materialist science and proved that art had to be just as materialist. It is true that I was a bit slow to understand, but Marinetti, well, he took this idea to heart and wrote a manifesto that praised factory chimneys and everything produced inside factories."[27]

[26] Nikolai Roslavits, *On Non-Objective Art*, 1917, unpublished manuscript, Khardzhiev Archive, The Foundation Cultural Centre, Khardzhiev-Chaga, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

[27] *Présence de Marinetti*, Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1982, p. 234.



Suprematist Cross, motif: 1916, version: 1920-1926.
Oil on canvas, 64 x 80 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Supremus No. 50, spring 1916. Oil on canvas, 97 x 66 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Marinetti's exclamatory bombast rooted in *zaum*ist non-sequiturs became a model for Malevich's own declarations. But if the reader crouches alongside some of the rhetoric that attempts to explain the mystery of Suprematism, patterns of cogent thought emerge if certain "givens" are accepted. For example, Malevich drew upon the word, "objectless" as a descriptive element of Suprematism. As decoded by Jean-Claude Marcadé, a French art historian:

"Malevich was unique in that he gave philosophical significance to the pairing of figuration (*predmetnost*) and the objectless (*bepredmetnost*) which emerged from the theory and art of the 1910s as a way to designate a new reality – the rise of nonfiguration and abstraction. In 1919 the Polish-Ukranian-Russian painter stated:

'In mentioning the objectless in 1913-16, I only wanted to point out clearly that Suprematism does not treat of things, objects, etc. and that's all; the objectless, generally speaking, was beside the point.'

Thus, the painter clearly distinguished between the objectless as an operative mode and '…the objectless generally speaking' – that is, in a philosophical Suprematist sense. He deliberately did not seek a different

word for the philosophical objectless. Malevich could have used objectivity (*obektivnost*) and non-objectivity (*neobektivnost*) to describe both the philosophical objectless and non-figurative art, which he does elsewhere, but according to my (Marcadé's) hypothesis, he did not choose to do so because 'objectivity/non-objectivity' did not acknowledge his project, instead associating his thought with that of various other doctrines. There is almost a certain objectivity to Suprematism, the objectivity of the objectless, of the total absence of the object."[28]

In effect, the objectless *is* the objectivity of Suprematism, the nothing that is there becomes the object; the total absence of anything becomes a philosophical something. Accepting this premise frees the creative process from the tyranny of the figurative – the object. It is from this zero that all movement begins. And not wanting to be limited by the plastic arts, Malevich sought the imprimatur of religion for his ideas. He wrote on 11 April 1920:

"I no longer consider Suprematism like a painter or like a form that I took out from a dark skull. I stand before it like an outsider contemplating a phenomenon. For many years I was concerned with my movement in colours, leaving the religion of the spirit aside, and twenty-five years have passed, and now I have returned, or rather I have entered into the religious world; I do not know why it happened so. I visit churches, I look at the saints and the entire spiritual world in action, and now I see in myself, and perhaps in the world as a whole, that the time is coming for a change of religions. I have seen that just as painting has moved toward its pure form of the act, so too the world of religions is moving toward the religion of the Pure Act. All the saints and prophets were impelled by this very act, but were not able to realize it, blocked as they were by reason, which sees goal and meaning in everything, and every act of the religious world smashed against these two walls of the rational fence"

[28] Jean-Claude Marcadé, *Painting and Writing on the Development of the Suprematist Philosophy*.

Dynamic Suprematism, Supremus No. 57, 1916.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm. Tate Gallery, London.

Supremus No. 56, summer 1916.
Oil on canvas, 80.5 x 71 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

From this rationalization, Malevich in his writing attempted to straddle the fence between painter and philosopher. He defended both the physical existence of non-objective art and the philosophical essence of the truth of being. Had he not embraced such irrational thinkers as

Marinetti as pillars of wisdom, had he not wandered among flagellating Futurists sowing the air with manifestos and looking to fascism to restore their nihilistic world order, Kasimir Malevich might have been regarded more soberly in his lifetime. Sadly for western art, the duality of his philosophy and art and the flashpoint where they came together was lost amid the cacophony of the likes of *Zang Tumb Tumb*, Zaum and Absurdist alogisms. The horrific context of the Russian Revolution and the explosion of the have-nots who raged for bread and revenge beneath the banners of Marx and Lenin reduced those voices that had no great international cachet to a chorus of contradictory tongues, which finally became nothing but white noise.

With all this frenetic activity surging through Petrograd and Moscow, one wonders when Kasimir Malevich had time to sleep. He was a prolific writer and painter. The wedding of words and images stressing the minimizing of the displayed image gradually resulted in his "Suprematist Whites". As seen earlier, the "dissolution" or "fading away" pictures began the dissolving of solid geometric symbols of objectless combinations into the infinity of the white canvas. His sketches explored this "fading" phenomenon using the edge of a pencil on graph paper trying various combinations of intersecting planes in colour and monochrome. His explorations led to both *Dissolution of a Plane* and his "Beam Painting", *Untitled (Suprematist Painting)*, 1918 (discussed earlier) and *Suprematist Painting*, 1917, depicting a golden plane, both tilted and angled away from the canvas surface, glowing and dissolving at its far end into the white canvas background.

This journey into the disappearance of his geometric forms into nothingness continued to intrigue his intellectual process, reducing ever further the viewable image. In 1918, following the violent catharsis of the Russian Revolution, he created an arrangement of vague rectangles against the white canvas reminiscent of his action figure at the centre of *The Woodcutter*. The labourer's back is no longer rounded, but straightened. The head is more helmet-like than even the Suprematist version (*Suprematist Composition, 1917*) of this subject discussed earlier. This monochrome rendering, 38 x 27 inches, seems to have been arrested just before fading out completely.

It has been suggested that this figure reaching out with an impotent arm is the human consciousness groping its way into a spiritual world. This character is fusing with the cosmic world, the white space of the fourth dimension where all art is obliterated in the future. Of this phenomenon he wrote:

“Our century is a huge boulder aimed with its weight into space. From this follows the collapse of all the foundations in Art, as our consciousness is transferred onto completely different ground. The field of colour must be annihilated, that is, it must transform itself into white…the development of white…points to my transformation in time. My imagining of colour stops being colourful. It merges into one colour – white.”

And from there he reached into the ultimate rejection of art as a depiction of anything, his ephemeral Suprematist Composition: White on White. A line encompasses an area forming a white square on a white field. Now is that line the edge of the Black Square with a White Square just inside it? Do the two planes occupy the same space? The tilted placement of the two sandwiched squares within the frame suggests an upward pull to the right by whatever cosmic forces exist in the infinite space. With this painting, Malevich reached the pinnacle of his Suprematist visualization in the two-dimensional plane. He had placed himself in the position of not being able to top his accomplishments, having taken his basic premise to its ultimate conclusion. All that was left was an endless repetition of what had already been demonstrated. Though his philosophical meandering continued to hop about the grid, seeking wisdom and confirmation, he had visually painted himself into a corner.

Spheric Evolution of a Plane, 1917.
Oil on canvas, 65.6 x 48.2 cm.

Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Sakura.

Spheric Evolution of a Plane, winter 1917-1918.
Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 74.5 cm. Private Collection.

He cleaned his brushes and put them away for what he declared

was the last time. His focus shifted entirely to his writing and a need to embrace the Revolution and leave his legacy to the masses through teaching. In 1920 he declared the death of easel painting.

But Malevich the artist left behind a visual record that allows today's analysts to run rings around their vocabularies, parsing his surviving writings and canvasses. At the time of their creative execution however, an even more grisly execution was sweeping across Europe as the shells of the Great War tore into flesh and bone.

At the same time as Russian soldiers trudged back home in defeat, but eager to turn upon their countrymen who had brought Russia to its knees, on the home front the end of Great War was not the only conflict in Malevich's life. His Suprematism had become a clarion call to arms in the Russian art world. His "objectless" paintings flew in the face of the growing number of Constructivists who drew on reality for their creations. By calling his artistic vision "Suprematism" which challenged all other artists with its implied "supremacy" of concept and execution, Malevich swatted a hornets' nest.

Much as the later Bauhaus school founded in 1919 created an architectural/functional style of art where creative concepts and innovative technologies were applied to utilitarian objects, the earlier Constructivists employed Futurist dynamics and real architectural materials to their free-standing non-utilitarian art works. Illusion was abandoned to be replaced by three-dimensional creations of glass, wood, iron, aluminium and whatever other building materials came to hand. Often, the constructions had moving parts and each part was symbolic rather than existing purely as an element of the whole.

Vladimir Tatlin had journeyed to Paris and discovered Braque and Picasso's Cubism that fractured elements of reality onto a two-dimensional picture plane. He returned to Russia in 1913 and took the multi-viewpoint vision of Cubism and applied it to three-dimensional constructions that existed as non-representational works of art.

While Malevich had reduced the act of translating the spatial relationships of Suprematism's complex philosophy to a minimalist act of painted geometric execution on the canvas, Tatlin – and his followers – produced complex structures. As with Suprematism, each Constructivist work had its explanation of what was what and what each element represented.

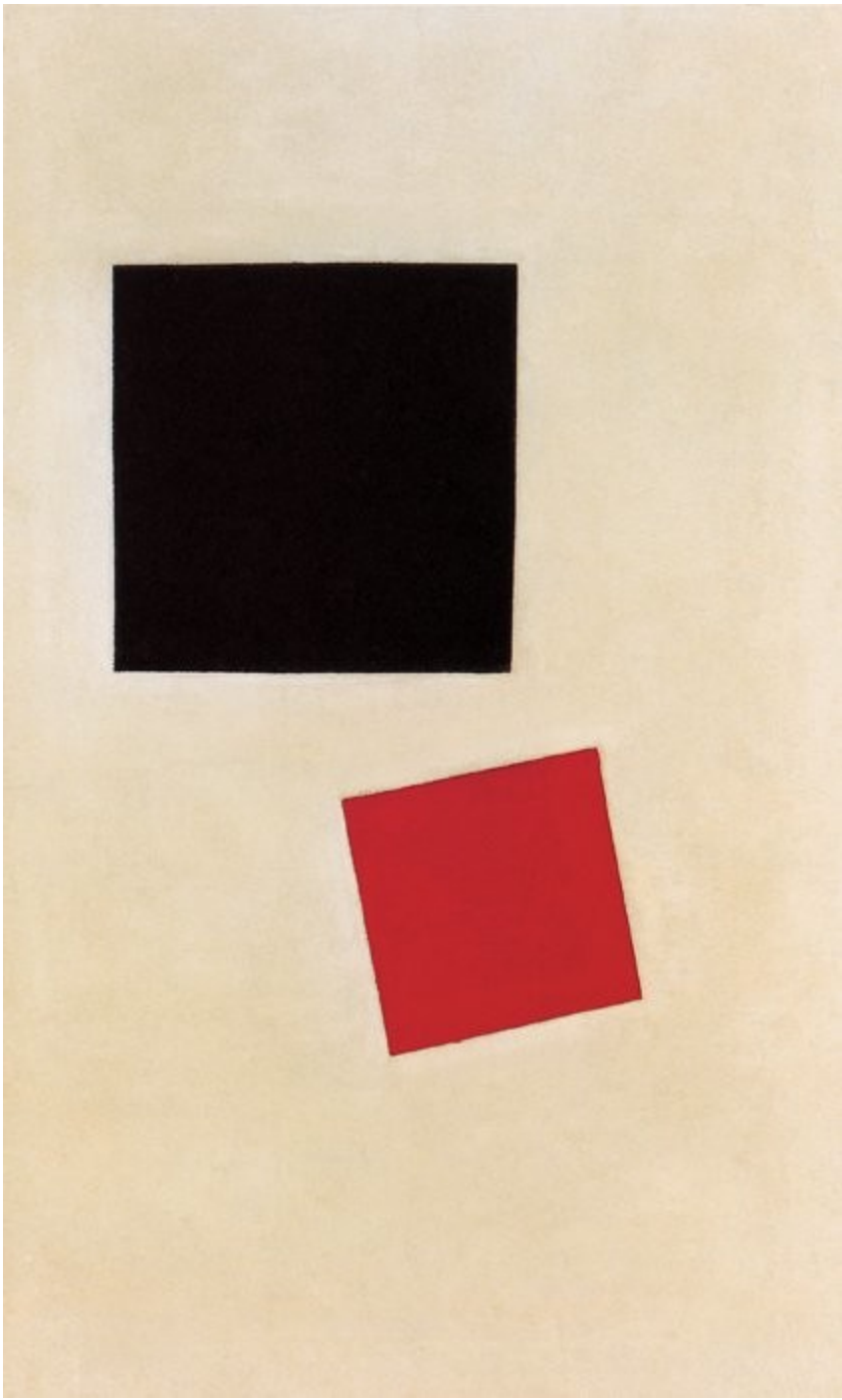
Constructivism was less of a movement than a loose-knit trend among young Russian artists attempting to come to grips with the surging shift toward abstract and non-objective art. In painting and

sculpture, they wanted to translate their awareness of the intellectual and creative applications of technology, but still keep one foot in reality. The early twentieth century was in uproar with the war ravaging Western Europe, revolution building to a flashpoint in Eastern Europe, and the clank and rumble of mechanization growing louder with each new invention for progress or for death. Reality had become a relative concept.

Malevich had retreated to zero and the quest for purity with Suprematism. The Constructivists adapted the plane facets of Cubism to three-dimensional realities. Anywhere else in the world, those opposing ideas could co-exist with tut-tuts and lip-service of yeas and nays. Not so in the turmoil that was Russia. Idealism veiled in denial flourished among Russian intellectuals and artists as discontent flogged politicians, the military and a few million disenfranchised peasants. As long as the Constructivists cleaved to their position that art and architecture were tools to help deal with social and economic problems and not the products of an isolated “fine art” that existed above the reality of existence, the “art for art’s sake” believers were no longer relevant.

While both camps were offshoots of their Futurist roots, their disparate adaptations caused their followers to engage in hostile face-offs employing name-calling and fist-shaking along with a blizzard of words hastily penned into contrary manifestos. And most of the verbal warfare centred around Malevich and Tatlin.

Dissolution of Construction, 1918.
Oil on canvas, 97 x 70 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



Painterly Realism. Boy with Knapsack – Colour Masses in the Fourth Dimension, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.4 cm.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

To grasp the situation Malevich faced at the conclusion of the war in 1919, another chapter of his complex life and the internecine battles that consumed the Russian art world must be explored. No life is lived on a single plane and these artists, free-thinkers, poets and playwrights formed an incredibly interwoven social stratum.

The position of Suprematism in the Russian avant-garde in 1916 had caused Malevich considerable worry. The Constructivists, while not in lockstep, were the larger group and because of the somewhat informal nature of membership were less prone to internal strife. The Suprematists, on the other hand, were fractured. Malevich had most of the stature, both from recognition of his work before Suprematism and from his virtual non-stop writing on the subject. Because of this vulnerability and the Russian "all or nothing" mindset about which philosophy would prevail, he needed something to gather his followers together under a common banner.

As the spring of 1917 melted the frozen ground in Flanders and drowned whole platoons of fleeing Russian soldiers in seas of exploding mud, Kasimir Malevich published his *Supremus* journal. However auspicious, its birth was overshadowed by the Russian Revolution that began in January and by spring had caused chaos in most of the major cities with its violence and confusion. Artists and intellectuals had a hard time picking sides in a debate over artistic philosophies when statues of the Czar were being wrenched from their pedestals, citizens were fleeing Loyalist police who rushed about in packs gunning down revolutionary revellers. Armed battalions of soldiers fresh from killing their officers and emptying armouries hunted down the Loyalist police and wiped them out with wagon-mounted machine guns and volleys of rifle fire. Every basement became a bunker and mobs unfurling banners raged up and down the thoroughfares, swigging stolen vodka and collecting firearms from corpses.

As battles of words surged back and forth in the Duma over food for starving peasants, seizing the lands of wealthy Royalists, or what to do with the Czar and his family, the *Supremus* journal was assembled. Artists and philosophers pitched in their contributions to Malevich's

publication while .30 calibre bullets chipped chunks out of brickwork.

He felt the journal that strictly supported only the Suprematists was an important ideological tool necessary for the establishment of groundwork for his movement. He had great plans for subsequent issues. The journal offered the opportunity to promote and develop discussion and to experiment with both writing and illustration. He called it his "laboratory house" (*dom-laboratoria*). Malevich had originally decided to title the journal *Nul* or "Nothing". In changing the title, he stepped a short distance from the "nothingness" of his philosophy via the minimal "zero" to a search for a utopian concept of art.[29]

The journal was divided into four main parts: Painting, Literature, Music and Theatre. The last pages of the issue were reserved for critical reviews, correspondence and general art news. Malevich wrote an article *Greetings to the Suprematists* which offered in part:

"Many years now have become decades. But we have as before remained true to our spirit.

Burning in ever new materials we have acquired, we will move tirelessly – or like ovens, we re-melt new conclusions and form deductions.

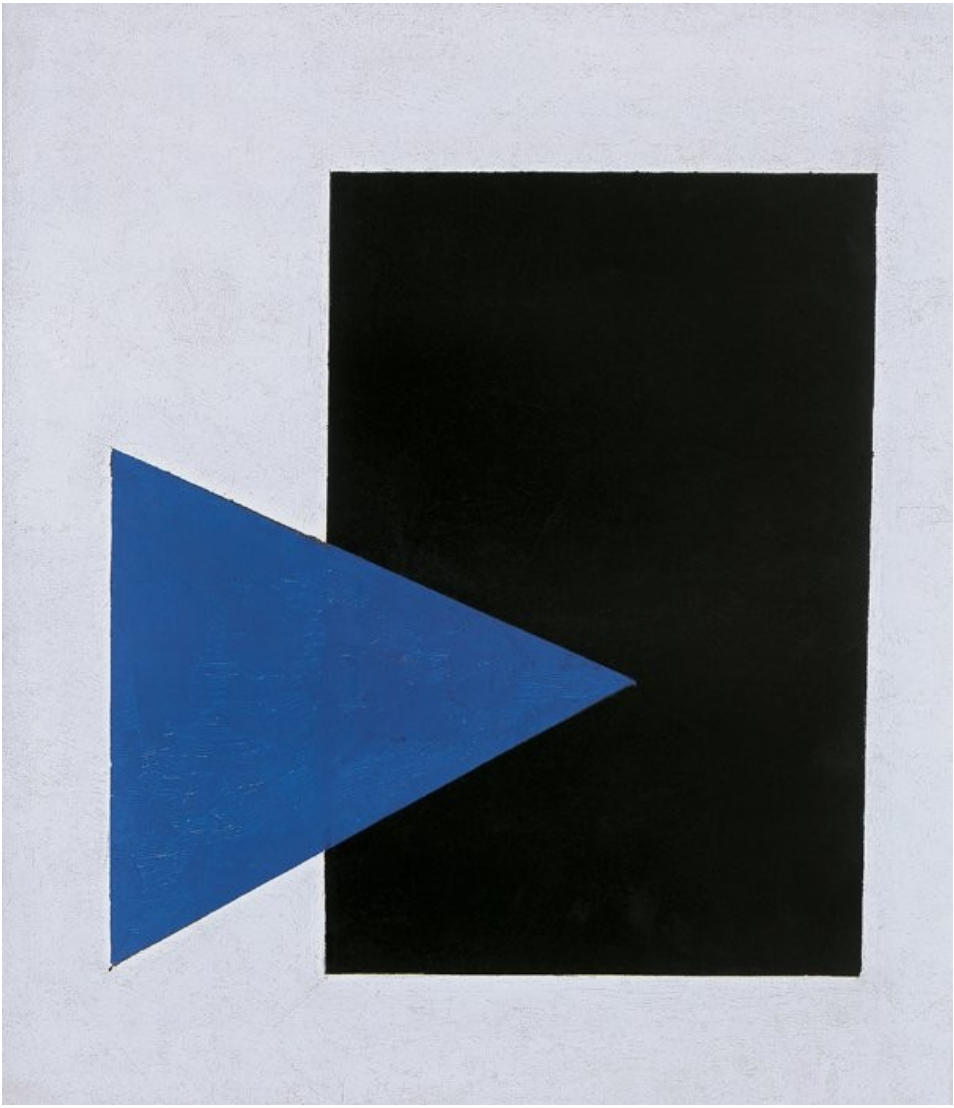
I am delighted with our meeting on the pages of the laboratory-house, *Supremus*.

Many times have we met along the stations of our common road. Where we met, the bonfires burned, raising the flame of the mountain.

Jack of Diamonds, *Donkey's Tail*, *Target*, *Union of Youth*, *Tramway V*, *0.10*, *The Store*. These are the sites of our burned-out bonfires, our days already past."

This piece was followed by *On Non-Objective Art* by the composer, Roslavets. The Nikolai Khardzhiev Archive in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam contains many manuscripts destined for the first issue including *Architecture as a Slap in the Face to Ferroconcrete* and *Futurism* by Malevich. An essay of his titled *Theatre* is followed by "What Happened in February and March 1917?" The first issue of *Supremus* was considerably bulked up by Malevich and contributors, but it was never distributed.

[29] Nina Gurianova, *Laboratory House*, Reconstructing the Journal.



Suprematist Painting, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 57 x 66.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

Dissolution of a Yellow Plane, 1917-1918.
Oil on canvas, 106 x 70.5 cm.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

As the publishing date drew near in June 1918 and notes flew back and forth between the Suprematists anticipating its appearance, an undercurrent of delay began to push the date back. One day the journal was "at the printer" and the next day a new date was offered. As Malevich had feared early on, his Suprematists were not of a single mind. He had striven to achieve a "collective" movement putting aside individual interpretation of Suprematist goals, but, as with every committee or joint effort since the dawn of man, dissenting voices began to shred the group's integrity.

Nadezhda Udaltsova (1886-1961), a former student of Vladimir Tatlin who had worked in Cubism before joining Suprematism was part of the tight group that included Alexandra Ekster, Liubov Popova, Nina Genke, Olga Rozanova, Ivan Kliun, Ivan Puni, Ksenia Boguslavskaya and others. Between 1915 and 1916, all of them including Malevich had worked at the Verbovka Village Folk Centre, an artisan co-operative in the village of Verbovka located in the Ukrainian province of Kiev. Local folk artists were encouraged to translate the sketches and artwork of avant-garde artists into decorative projects.

Udaltsova wrote in her diary for 22 November 1917:

"They (a few members of the group) broke with Suprematism in an outrageous manner. Malevich suddenly went crazy, and we quarrelled; if the journal comes out and we get back what we put into it, fine, but if the money is gone, horrible…There was such faith in the journal; it has become bogged down, but I still think it will appear."

That hope was soon dashed and Udaltsova wrote later on 20 March 1918:

"How terribly disappointing that our journal has not come out."[30]

After all the passion, ringing declarations and demands for sweeping changes in the avant-garde art world, the enterprise was undone by the printer's bill.

Besides his Suprematist painting and writing, Malevich had been swept up in the February 1917 Revolution. Earlier, in 1905, he been caught up in that smaller revolt and spent some time dodging police and skulking up and down backstairs at night with a Bulldog .450 calibre

pistol in his back pocket. Twelve years later, in the dangerous streets of Moscow, Leningrad and Petrograd, he flirted with the anarchists while everyone chose sides between the Reds and Whites.

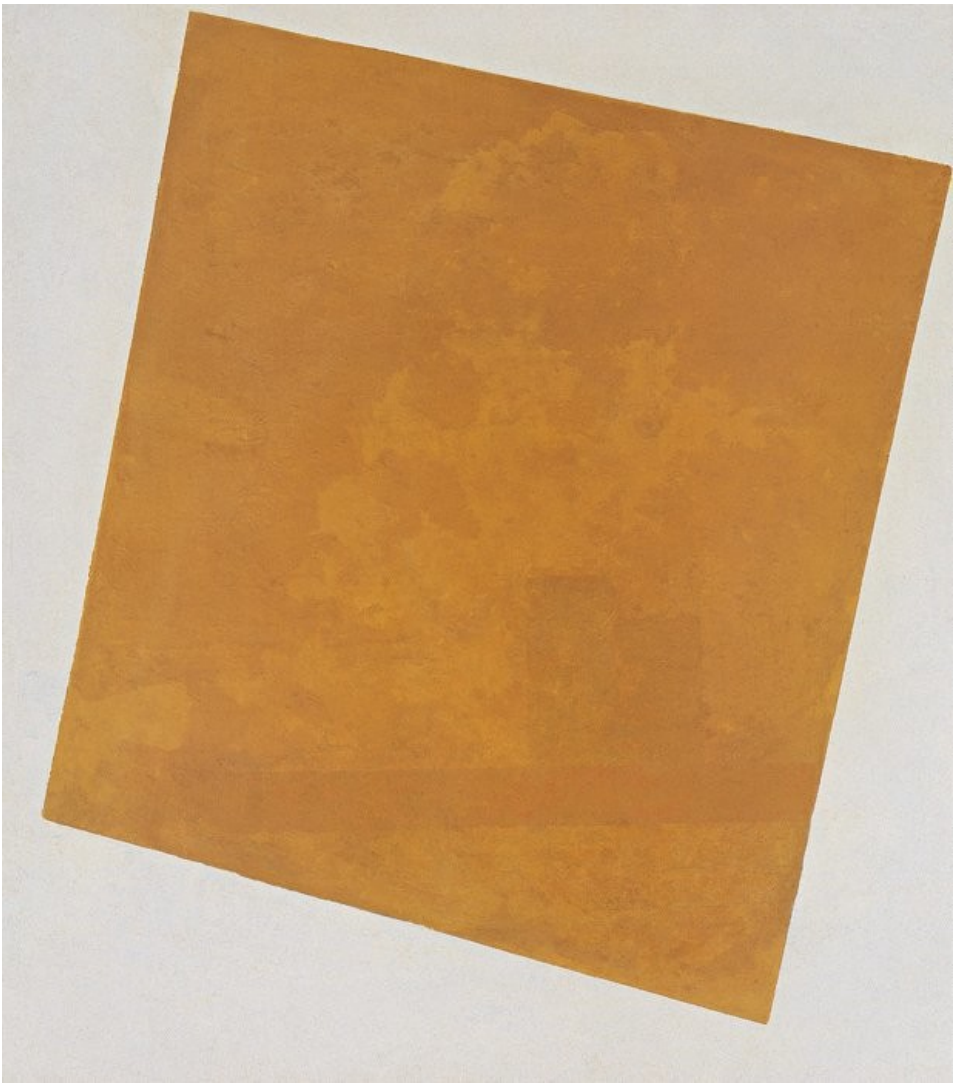
For a brief time in March 1917 he became Chairman of the Moscow Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies where he organized their Art Section. He met Lazar (El) Lissitsky there and began organizing artist workshops. These were free "People's Academies" and were created to be disseminated to cities such as Petrograd and Leningrad and further into the provinces, teaching both fine and applied arts. Malevich became a commissar for the protection of artworks and the churches in Moscow and eventually moved on to become elected to the Moscow Division of the Visual Arts Section of the Commissariat of Public Education. At the same time, in 1917-18, he taught at the *Svomas* (Free State Art Studios).

One of his students was Ivan Kudriashev, whose father assisted the Soviet scientist and resident mystic, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the inventor of a reactive rocket. From this association Malevich developed a keener interest in space flight built up from his days of set design for the play *Victory over the Sun*. The concept of space satellites also fitted in with his Suprematist geometric images of objects (non-objects) in flight. But he carried his ideas further than images of space flight painted by many of his contemporaries. Based on the mystic/scientific theories of Tsiolkovsky that were then just developing, Malevich wrote in a latter to Matiushin:

"The keys of Suprematism led me to discover what had not yet been realized. My new painting does not belong to the Earth exclusively. The Earth has been abandoned like a house infected with termites. And in fact, in man, in his consciousness, there is a striving towards space. An urge to take off from the Earth…"[31]

[30] Nina Gurianova, *Diary: Nadezhda Udaltsova*, *Dnevnik 1916-1918*, Moscow: RA, 1994, p. 39-42.

[31] Charlotte Douglas*, op.cit.,* p. 26.



Projection of a Plane, motif: 1915, version: 1916-1917.
Oil on canvas, 78 x 69.5 cm. Private Collection.

Suprematist Composition with a Plane in Projection, 1915.
Oil on canvas, 57 x 57 cm. Private Collection.

Tsiolkovsky wrote:

"It is difficult to foresee the fate of any thought or discovery, whether it will be a reality, in what form, to what it will lead, to what extent it will change and improve human life, and whether it will radically transform our views and our science."[32]

As the science of warfare hammered the trenches on the Western Front, Malevich found himself in tune with the rest of the Russian avant-garde artists in pursuing science as a subject for artistic translation. As the smoke was settling from the November Revolution, Alexandre

Rodchenko, Vassily Kandinsky, Ivan Kliun and the brothers Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg joined the march toward a new materialism by gathering the symbols of science into abstract renderings.

Malevich branded the efforts of Rodchenko "Construction Art", which would later evolve into "Constructivism" in Naum Gabo's 1920 *Realistic Manifesto*. Of course Malevich was not interested in just slapping down images on canvas without a thorough philosophical underpinning. He produced a block of thirty-four drawings done in crayon and watercolour using Suprematist objects. Instead of the flight metaphor suggesting aeroplanes on bombing and mapping runs across the trenches and fields of France, now the sketches appeared to present representations of space stations and orbiting satellites. And, as was his habit, Malevich included some lines of text to guide viewers through his eerily prescient thought process:

"The Suprematist apparatus, if one can call it that, will be one whole, without any fastenings. A bar is fused with all the elements, just like the earth's sphere, which contains life perfectly in itself, so every constructed Suprematist body will be included in a natural organization, and form a new satellite. One only has to find the inter-relationship between the earth and the moon, two bodies racing along in space. Perhaps a new Suprematist satellite equipped with all the elements can be built between them; it will travel in its orbit, creating its own new path."

Amid the flowering of Soviet art in this fresh new regime, Suprematism began to gain cachet as the signature artistic form of the most recent "New Order" avant-garde. Suprematist geometric elements were used on posters, programme description folders, signs and Party brochures.

Once again, he plunged into stage design, this time at the Petrograd Theatre of Musical Drama, where he created the sets and costumes for Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe*. Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930) was yet another proponent of the Russian Futurist style that influenced Malevich.

Mayakovsky arrived in Petrograd in 1912 after a brisk life of bad political choices, arrests, avoiding prison by eating his notebooks, not avoiding prison and discovering poetry while serving time in solitary confinement. On his release – after having his uneaten poems confiscated – he joined the Futurists. After searching for a new creative outlet at the Stroganov School of Industrial Arts and the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, he finally moved to St.

Petersburg where he put his mellowing eccentricity to work, participating in the manifesto “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste”. He found his niche among the St. Petersburg Futurists in denunciation of Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, donned a yellow tunic, read poetry on street corners and threw tea at passers-by.

[32] www.russianspaceweb.com/tsiolkovsky_legacy.html

Supremus No. 55, 1916. Oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Cosmic Magnetic Construction, motif: 1916, version: 1920s.
Oil on canvas, 104 x 59.5 cm. Private Collection.

Joining the Futurists led to his expulsion from the Moscow Institute, but Mayakovsky followed that event with his great long poem *Cloud in the Trousers* in 1915. He also met Lili Brik, a critic's wife to whom he dedicated some of his more depressed lyrics: "I do not need you!/ I do not want you!" in *The Backbone Flute*. She had a softening influence on his intense life, talking him into getting his teeth fixed and improving his appearance.

As Malevich hung his first Suprematist exhibition (*0.10*) in 1915, Mayakovsky published his love poem, *Cloud in the Trousers* which evoked images of volcanic death and destruction when the heroine tells the hero she's marrying someone else. The hero's reaction, which in part reads:

People sniff –
there's a smell of burnt flesh!
Here come some men.
All shining!
In helmets!
No heavy boots please!
Tell the firemen
to go gently when the heart's on fire.

….gives readers a taste of incendiary love mixed with revolution.

In *Mystery-Bouffe,* in which he collaborated with Malevich's stage design, Mayakovsky created a religious mystery play that mocked religion. The plot involved a struggle between two groups, the "Unclean" working class and the "Clean" upper class. The earth lay destroyed by a flood while the survivors sought refuge at the North Pole. The "Unclean" defeat the "Clean" and create a workers' paradise on Earth, where people…

"will live in warmth
and light, having had electricity
move in waves."

Later, the Moscow Soviet dismissed the play even as Mayakovsky sought to make a film of it. The Soviet dismissed it as having. "incomprehensible language for the broad masses".

Malevich saw the "incomprehensible" script as grist for his own theatrical interpretation. He wrote:

“I saw my task not as the creation of associations but, with a reality existing beyond the limits of the stage, as the creation of a new reality. I treated space not as illusory but as Cubist.”

The concept is the antithesis of realist theatrical performances, with the stage essentially Constructivist with no representational backdrops or props; theatre is not true life - therefore its performances should not mimic life but instead represent the world of the theatre itself. The entertainment was intense – dancers and acrobats would eagerly show off their skills to the audience. Circus performers appeared in scenes making the plays much more whimsical and extravagant. Speaking-part characters dressed alike in grey and chanted in unison – the mass hero (and future “collective”) – who would create the future Utopia. Players also wore industrial clothing – *prozodezhda* – worn by workers in the factories in order to imply an efficiency similar to these workers.

One of the problems with *Mystery-Bouffe* was its Bolshevik undertones; even though the Revolution had been in full flower for more than a year, its final political outcome remained in doubt.

Woman, 1915. Oil on canvas, 87.5 x 72 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

IV. The Flight Crashes to Earth

Peasant in a Field,
motif: 1911-1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 71.3 x 44.2 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

"Non-objective art stands without windows and doors, like a pure sensation in which life, like a homeless tramp, desires to spend the night."[33]
Kasimir Malevich

"By means of an image we are often able to hold on to our lost belongings. But it is the desperateness of losing which picks the flowers of memory, binds the bouquet."
Sidonie Gabrielle Colette

During this transitional period, as Malevich coped with the abandonment of comfortable Cubism, Futurism and figurative painting in favour of granting metaphorical flight and cosmological freedom to artists, the demands of his art aged him. While his Suprematist works showed up in shop window shows, in Futurist exhibitions and wherever he could find a wall out of the weather, only the flames of his core intellect held him together. The collection of philosophies buzzing around his synapses wove in and out of the Hegelian third – and final – stage of evolution which has the spirit itself rising away from nature and becomes a "pure universal form, totally free … in which the spiritual essence attains the consciousness and feeling of itself."

Malevich wanted to soar, but the deep mud of his own "Nevsky Prospect" held him fast to the political and financial realities around him.

In 1919, he took advantage of an invitation from his Suprematist acolyte, El Lissitzky, and began teaching at the Vitebsk Institute in Belorussia, eventually replacing Marc Chagall as director. To do this, he quit his Moscow teaching job, because he had no apartment, could not afford electricity or to buy wood for his stove and had moved into his small cold-water dacha in the village of Nemchinovka. During that same year, because of a shortage of paper and runaway inflation caused by the war, he prevailed upon the Vitebsk school's lithography shop to print his collection of thirty-four drawings and the accompanying text as well as his book of essays entitled *On the New Systems of Art*.

When Malevich joined the Vitebsk Art School, he created a new type of art education that expected all types of art to revolve around Suprematist principles. Both EI Lissitzky and the school rector, Vera Emolaeva, gave him their full support. This concept was united under the name UNOVIS (the Affirmers of the New Art).

In two lectures Malevich explained his collectivity ideas and the creative process, and in December 1920 had the UNOVIS Lithography shop print his book, *Suprematism, 34 Drawings.* The rapidly-solidifying government, however, began to take a dim view of Malevich's "collectivity" teaching theories as they pertained to his radical art, and suggested strongly that he clear his UNOVIS out of Vitebsk. He gathered up his students and by the end of 1921 tried to insinuate his ideas into the Institute for Artistic Culture (INKhUK) in Moscow, which had been created in 1920. By 1921, however, INKhUK had tied their fortunes to the hammer and nails art of Constructivism and the gulf between the Constructivists and Suprematists was too wide to bridge.

Once again he assembled his students at the railway station – with each wearing a "Black Square" armband – and bundled the lot off to Petrograd where he managed to keep the UNOVIS school afloat within the framework of INKhUK from 1923-1926. While he was teaching, he also managed to complete the manuscript for his book, *Suprematism, The World as Non-Objectivity* in 1922.

This period gave Malevich some respite from his painting and allowed him to take advantage of the academic world to do some research and study of the evolution of the world's art forms. Suprematism was not considered an isolated phenomenon but an extension of its predecessors and a framework for a new modern culture. At INKhUK, he headed the Department of Formal Theory, a gathering place for many well-known Leningrad artists. Malevich organized a group of young research assistants to submit the major art forms Cézannism, Futurism, Cubism and Suprematism to intense study based around his theory of *Supplementary Elements* in art.

[33] Malevich, letter to Konstantine Rozhdestvensky, May 7, 1927, *Kasimir Malevich in the Russian Museum*, St. Petersburg: Palace Edition, 2000, from Yevgenia Petrova, *Malevich's Suprematism and Religion,* Guggenheim Museum.

To the Harvest II (Marfa and Vakan),
motif: 1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 82 x 61 cm. The State

Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Vakan, motif: 1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on cardboard mounted on plywood, 72.5 x 51.1 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

He postulated that these supplementary elements were structural commonalities in all the systems but adapted to each. As the systems were analyzed, examples were discovered such as the *fibrous graph line* of Cézanne, Cubism's c*rescent line* and the *ruler-straight* line of Suprematism. These elements were determined for each system as pertained to colour and form. He used these supplementary elements throughout his teachings.

Fundamental to the development of his theory was the concept of "purity". In his essay *From Cubism & Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting*, he wrote:

"Our world of art has become new, non-objective, pure…"

This purity also related to the lineage of other artists and their work, from Cubism through Futurism and ending with examples of Suprematism's purity that began with the narrative of the Black Square and ended as his simple shapes eventually shaded or dissolved off into *zaum* space of the bright white infinity. Malevich virtually stopped painting between 1919 and 1928, and during this abstinence he discovered, like many abstract artists of his generation, this purity of art as it transcended itself. This concept – call it art for art's sake – was a bulwark against the utilitarian and pragmatic art of the Constructivists and Social Realists that was becoming ascendant in the new Communist society.

His theories veered away from aesthetics and delved into the organic purity of the body, adopting in some cases metaphors of infection, disease and parentage. He wrote in 1921:

"Professional artistic technological education will not produce anything until the spirit of the Communist society becomes organically linked with the artist." This application of his *Supplementary Element* theory metaphorically takes on the characteristics of a germ. It attaches itself to an artist's work and determines its form and structure.

In his essay *An Introduction to the Theory of the Supplementary Element in Painting* he poses an alternative to his transcendence of purity proposition with a disease control in art that determines the future direction for abstraction. Using Suprematist forms as his tools for students to use and create something new in art, he calls upon these

supplementary elements as catalysts of new visions. This new pseudo-scientific model took abstract art to such a rarefied theoretical level that it caused most contemporary artists' heads to spin. He strove to isolate – through his research assistants' work – the supplementary elements in past and current art in order to understand the changes in art and the integration of abstraction with each era's aesthetic and social interactions.

Malevich tracked down the indicators of style and change in painting and in doing so as Director of the State Institute of Artistic Culture in 1924, he extended his science metaphor and re-titled his teaching position *The Department of Bacteriology of Art*. He and his associates built upon the scientific model, reporting that they were "working on the problem of isolating from the historical material provided by the spatial arts the successive fundamental systems of painting." What they accomplished was a teaching method that injected "doses" of Suprematism, for example, into the work of those students whose creative flailing about required them. "Doctor" Malevich stated in a report to the Department of Painterly Culture's work plan for 1916-27 that the INKhUK Department of Painting "considers all painters as medicine considers the sick... various kinds of illnesses exist in the field of arts, too, that artists also can be classified according to various kinds of these wonderful illnesses or states, thanks to which an artist's organism produces one or another form of behaviour, what we call art or artistic culture. According to their form of behaviour, artists can be classified as naturalists, realists, geometricians, romantics, lyrical, mystics, metaphysicians etc., and prescribed treatment according to the diagnosis."

Young Girls in a Field,
motif: 1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 106 x 125 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The Mower II, motif: 1911-1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 85.8 x 65.6 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Head of a Peasant, 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 72 x 54 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Suprematist Transformation of a Peasant Girl,
1931-1932. Oil on canvas, 99 x 75 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Malevich was not alone in his metaphorical world. In 1919 the Russian poet Victor Shklovsky wrote that "the Suprematists did for art what chemistry has done for medicine: they isolated the active factor in the remedy." He elaborated that the Suprematist "remedies: "…can be of a Suprematist spatial [the straight line] or plane structure, which can be divided into dynamic Suprematism and non-objective, architectural statics according to the additional element of the square."

As Shklovsky suggests, the monochrome shape, especially the Black Square, emerged as the predominant, though not exclusive, supplementary element that Malevich launched into the future. Monochrome shapes were his "zero" of form, the material link to non-objectivity, that with which he started Suprematism. The Black Square was his first, last and signature monochrome shape that would always signal his presence in the world of art.

Within ten years of creating Suprematism, Malevich had created a format for extending the impact of his work. "To explore the nature of an artist currently is the most important task," Malevich said. A Malevich student, K. I. Rozhdestvensky wrote: "That was the basis of his school. The first phase of his pedagogy was a purification from all influences. The task was to achieve a pure painterly culture and to bring into it additional elements. At that time it was important, since we had very many influences from all sides."[34]

UNOVIS membership included Vera Ermolaeva, El Lissitzky, Ilya Chashnik, Nikolai Suetin, Anna Leporskaya, Lev Yudin, Evgenia Magaril, Lazar Khidekel and others. Their loyalty and dedication to the principles of Suprematism continued on through to the end of their careers. UNOVIS groups were also organized in Orenburg, Smolensk, Saratov, Perm and other cities.[35]

During the winter of 1919-1920 Malevich had been granted his first one-man show – *The Sixteenth State Exhibition* – in Moscow. The walls were literally covered with one hundred and fifty-three of his works. One of the paintings, *Suprematist Composition – 1916* was hung upside down and no-one seemed to notice. In his 1927 Berlin show that opened on November 30, several of his works were rotated when hung and seemed to function in this attitude without an adverse comment.

Malevich found himself adapting his three-dimensional stage design concepts to the production of cups and teapots for the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory. His UNISOV students assisted in these explorations. These designs, executed in 1923, were artistically innovative and boldly

geometric. During the short but highly productive period of their design and translation into mass production, UNISOV students Nikolai Suetin and Ilya Chashnik were recruited by the factory to oversee the sculpture of the pots and cups and paint the design masters. Factory artists created the mass production products, which are still available today.

The cups were only half round with grasping tabs rather than loop finger grips and painted with Suprematist geometric designs. The pot resembled one of the later "architektons" rather than a teapot. Only the handle, round top and spout remained to indicate its function. The design, while creative, apparently did pose some practical problems as indicated by a letter written to Malevich from the factory manager stating,

"Mr Malevich, your teapot does not pour well."

To which Malevich replied,

"Mr Director, It is not a teapot but the idea of a teapot."

These deconstructed utilitarian products are as much sculpture as they are functional objects and demonstrate the Suprematist approach to creating spatial renditions.

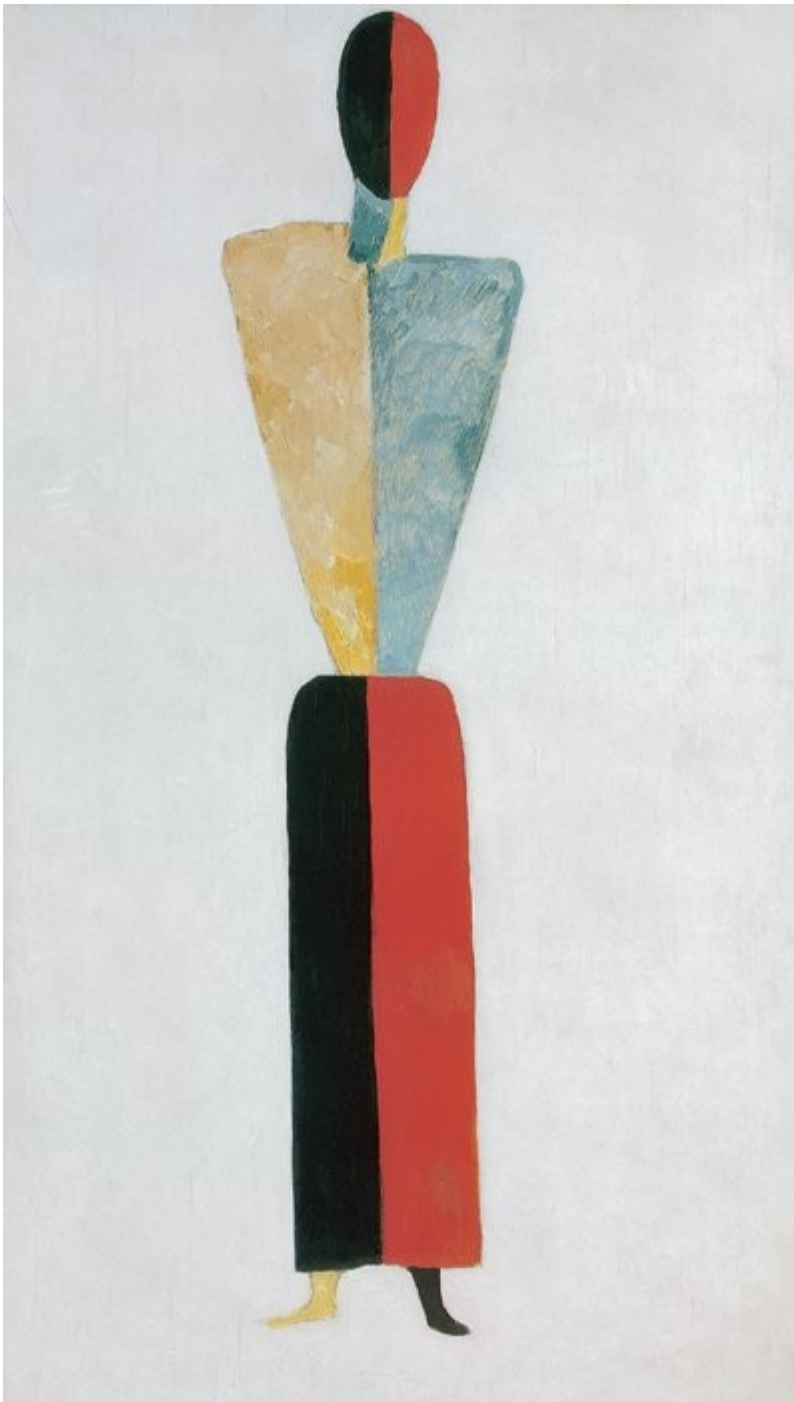
At one point in 1920 Malevich condemned craftsmanship as "nonsense" which argues for much of his more hacked and hewn early and later figurative works. These pronouncements arrived during a five-year moratorium on his painting following his white-on-white canvasses that seemed to signal a dead-end to the "ultimate colour and pure movement" genii he had set free from their corked bottle. In the text that accompanied his *34 Drawings*, he stated:

[34] Mark A. Cheetham, *Abstract Art Against Autonomy - Infection, Resistance, and Cure since the 60s,* Cambridge University Press.

[35] www.russianavantgarde.com/Malevich pages, Tatiana and Vera Kofyan, *Russian Avant-Garde Gallery*, Movements in Russian Art, 1900-1950.

Prototype of the New Image, motif: 1908-1909, version: 1928-1929. Oil on canvas, 46 x 37 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Torso, motif: 1908-1910, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 72 x 65 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Female Figure, 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 84.5 x 48 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Suprematist Figure No. 35, 1928-1932.
Oil on canvas, 124.2 x 106 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

"In Suprematism, painting is out of the question, painting has become obsolete, and the painter himself is a preconceived notion of the past."

Now with his focus shifted to a scientific study of art, his theories

progressed from the two-dimensional plane to a more plastic three-dimensional rendition of the "pure white" movement. The natural extension became architecture, not the architecture of mortar and bricks, windows and doorways, but architecture as modern art – modern Suprematist art. The organic link discussed earlier had a logical progression into the cell-like growth occurring in three dimensions. He wrote to Rozhdestvensky:

"In the spiritual sense, Suprematist painting and Suprematist architecture are the same. Sometimes the birth of Suprematist architecture is linked to the attempts to transfer painterly Suprematism to axonometry (*Author's note:* the revolution of co-ordinate planes. The intersection of single geometric objects. Projective geometry – definition, elements, point, line and plane, interval, calibration and the slope, intersection of single geometric objects, revolution of a plane into a projection plane.[36]) – but that is how *prouns* are born."

(*Author's note*: As created by EI Lissitzky: a *Proun* is a sculptural composition with several geometrical elements, both two and three-dimensional, dispersed across an uninflected ground in a manner that defies expectations of normal (or, indeed, possible) spatial relationships. Elements are arranged with little attention to the conventions of gravity, which has apparently been overcome (or at least countered by an equivalent upward force) in the infinite expanse of the *Proun* world. Interlocking and inter-related forms disturb equilibrium and 'curve' space; perspective devices distort the regularity of shapes, thereby creating the implication of potential movement. Contrasts of shape, scale and texture enhance these dynamic tensions.[37])

"But prouns are not Suprematist architecture. (continued Malevich) Not at all! Prouns lack what is most important in Suprematism: space filled with dynamic energy of the life of the cosmos. They only contain Suprematist-like elements, but they are material and heavy; they can be fashioned out of plywood, painted and mounted on a wall, but they do not radiate spatial energy. Prouns lack the Suprematist disposition."

But, alas, El Lissitzky attracted commissioned full-size realizations of his "Prouns" such as the tram station in Wolkenbügel while Malevich toiled away in his theoretical cloud land on a teacher's salary.

"Architecture" has come to mean a habitat for living or working. In the case of the Suprematist works, they are actually "structures" that imitate architecture, but in doing so render the elements of Suprematist paintings in three dimensions. This is not to say that Malevich regarded Suprematism as being above utilitarian functions; on the contrary, his

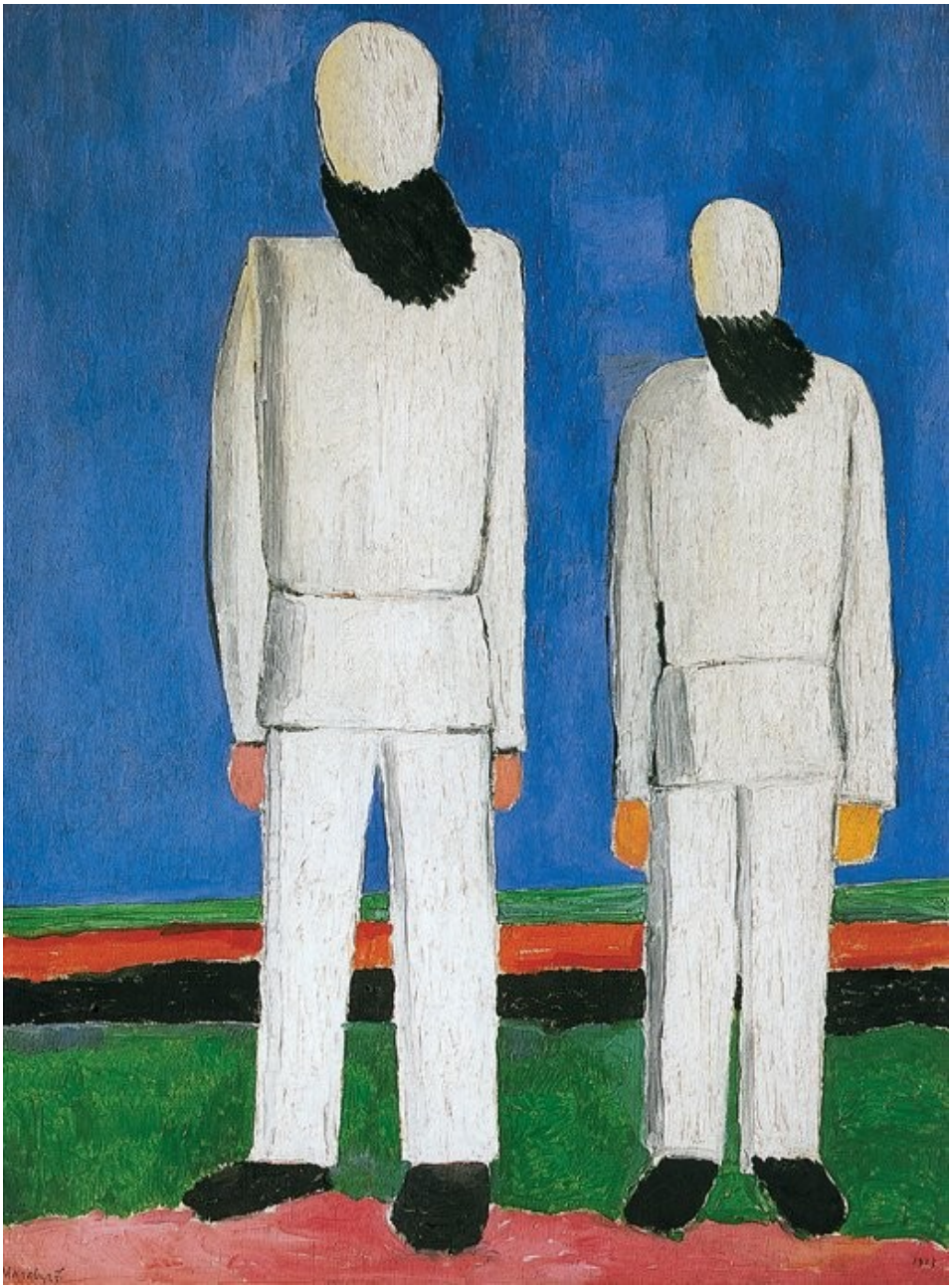
dreamland Utopia was a world *defined* by Suprematism in the design of buildings, teacups, transportation, textiles and monumental structures. But he had no desire to deal with the mechanics of implementing the practical uses, only the concepts – the "…idea of a teapot."

He translated his Suprematist concepts into a plaster third dimension with sculptural forms he called *architektons* and *planits*. The earliest of these objects were contemplated at the Vitebsk Popular Art School. The actual production began in 1923 at GinkHUK (State Institute of Artistic Culture) in Leningrad and grew in stature to become a primary focus of student activity. Malevich worked specifically with the students Nikolai Suetin and Ilia Chashnik from the porcelain cup and saucer work with the Lomonsonov Factory. Together with the student Lazar Khidekel, Malevich founded a laboratory of Suprematist architecture known as the *Suprematist Order*, headed by Suetin.

"Architecture as an art form" became the Order's mantra as the Constructivists toiled in application and function. First created in cardboard and later assembled from plaster cast blocks and wood supports, the roots of non-objectivity were settled upon objects using the same geometric shapes in both horizontal and, later, vertical planes. A roomful of the pieces looked like a modern industrial park. He called the smaller pieces "planits".

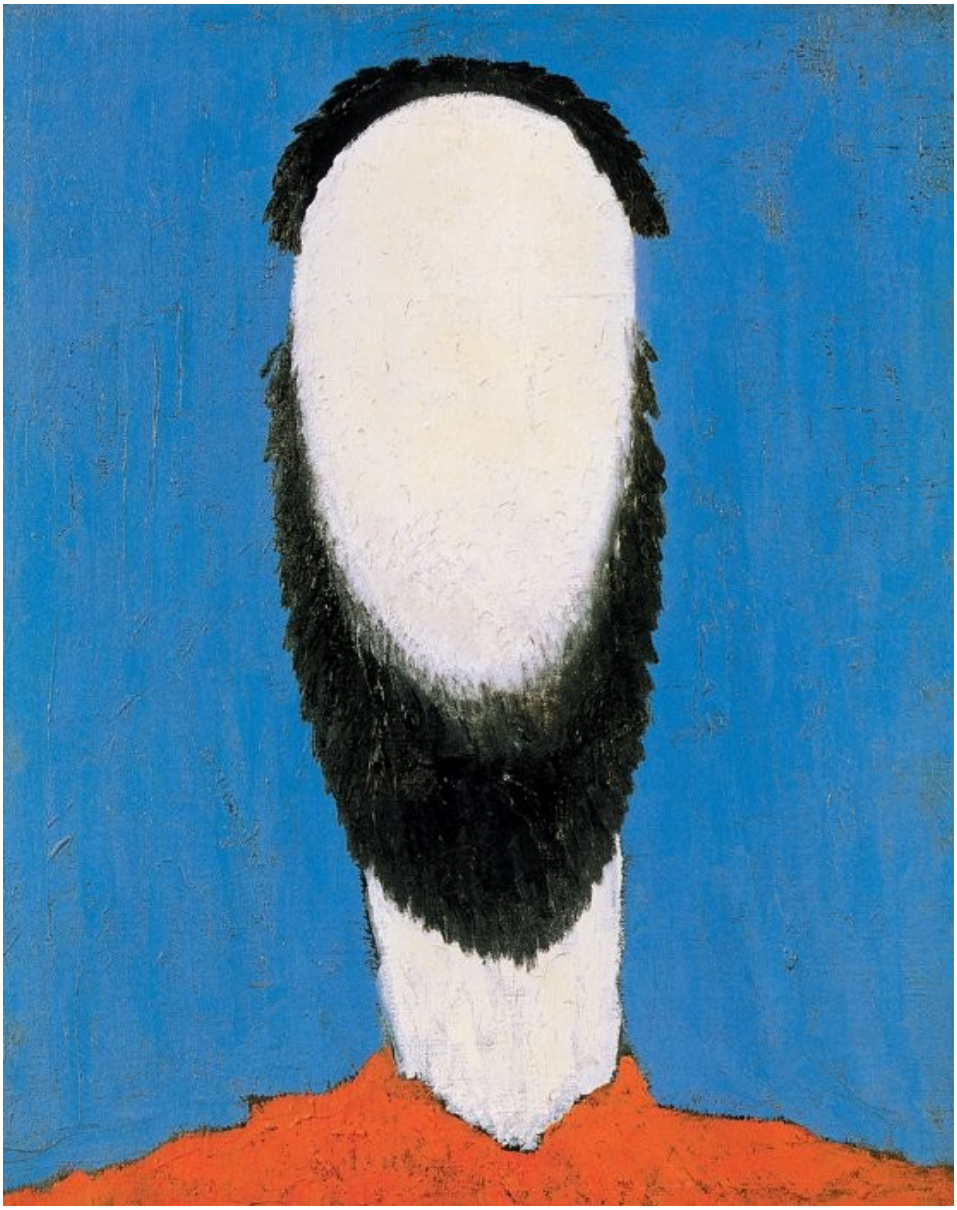
[36] Stanislav Majevski (ed.), *Civil Engineering Courses*, in *English Language, Study Curricula and Syllabi of Subjects*.

[37] Barry Friedman LTD, *EI Lissitzky*, 1890-1941.



Two Male Figures, c. 1930-1931.
Oil on canvas, 99 x 74 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Peasants, motif: 1910-1911, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 77.5 x 88 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Face of the Future Man, c. 1928-1932.
Oil on canvas, 55.5 x 45 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The students worked at mostly horizontal creations that spread

across scale hectares of imaginary space not unlike the excrescences that overgrew the “Death Star” in the 1977 film *Star Wars* or the 1936 British science fiction film *Things to Come.* Malevich produced axonometric drawings using Suprematist symbols and shapes fused together, floating in space, searching for laws to bind the three-dimensional structures to the dynamic interplay of his original geometric objects. All the time, he worked within a “cosmic” envelope of unrestrained space. Under the heat of electric bulbs, each architekton glowed with the white purity of an infinite beyond through which travelled the Suprematist geometrics.

While most of the architektons never survived due to the fragility of their plaster construction, those that exist in photographs and the few originals remaining demonstrate Malevich’s gift for cleaving through his own fuzzy, mystic, metaphysical wordplay. They stand as great surface treatment polyliths in step with the best of contemporary architecture.

Alpha Architekton built in 1920 is an assemblage of cantilevered planes and decks projecting from and grafted onto a horizontal beam. This long square block gives the piece a feeling of forward thrust much like the deck of an aircraft carrier. The ship metaphor continues in the “upper works” that rise above the aft portion of this main deck up to a bridge-like structure that spans the width of the narrow deck and overhangs space in the form of “wings”.

A later *Beta Architekton*, cobbled together in 1925, has a completely different feeling to its arrangement of decks and projections. There is a symmetry here that lacks the free-form of the *Alpha* model. This so closely mirrors the architecture of an auditorium and administration buildings wedded together in a complete concept that it could be dropped into any college campus and look right at home. And yet this explanation would horrify a Suprematist artist. See instead the geometry of a Suprematist painting built around the dominant square and rippling with rectangles, bits and pieces of agitated shapes. This *Beta* unit has the look of a space station bolted and screwed together in the weightless vacuum, naked to the solar wind and heartless illumination of the Sun.

In 1923 a vertical tower thrust upward from the horizontal to a height of 33 ½ inches of glistening plaster. Titled *GOTA,* the model rises in a series of set-backs and shafts from the basic street wall. A single black circle breaks the façade to remind viewers this is a Suprematist sculpture. Constructed before the Great Depression’s unlikely heroic Empire State Building (1930-1931) Chrysler Building (1928-1930) and Rockefeller Center (1930-1934), this prescient concept must have amused Malevich before his death in 1935. He saw his Suprematist

dream rising from the bedrock of New York City.

A city skyline in white plaster, titled *Suprematist Ornaments*, sits scattered in limbo. This collection of separate models gathered together in 1927 demonstrates the flexibility of both horizontal and vertical thrusting concepts. Fifteen models cover a space of only 17 ¾" x 15 ¾".

He saw no contradiction here since "Suprematism is only a new method of knowledge, the content of which will be different sensations," as he wrote in 1927. Existing in three dimensions and fastened to each other, the geometric shapes were even less mistaken for symbols or "stand-ins" for natural subject matter. Malevich's "blind architecture" had successfully renounced all natural references and was supremely non-functional, but had an eerie resemblance to many of the Prairie buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright and the starkly utilitarian aspects of the Bauhaus in Germany.

With these plaster architectonic slabs and pillars, he challenged the Constructivists, but having sold one model for six hundred roubles, the collection never found a permanent home. Several of the designs were shown at the Venice Bienniale in June 1924, at the Institute for Artistic Culture in 1925-26, and individual works arrived at the Tretiakov Gallery. Mostly they disappeared or were damaged in storage or shipping.

Malevich never tired of the architektons, though he eventually returned to painting. In 1932 he managed to gather together a collection of the sculptures for a show at the Russian Museum with the rather fusty title: "Artists of the RSFSR over the past Fifteen Years." While a mixture of his Suprematist and figurative paintings hung on the walls of the cubicle assigned to him, the architektons ringed the exhibition on their plinths. Dominating the collection were the tall upward-thrusting models, and each was capped with a small human figure. These were monuments. There was a vertical frailty to these architektons not present in past models; they lofted upward from minimal bases, defying gravity and the horizon. Like classical Greek columns, their height was neither buttressed nor supported. The total effect of the exhibition was of architecture in a future milieu, unfettered and reaching towards space.

Aware of his own mortality, Malevich requested that an architekton column be erected as his gravestone. On its top would be a telescope aimed at the planet Jupiter.

Malevich must have been aware that his concentration on the primacy of the peasant in his earlier work, and in the inherent

spirituality of the peasant as visualized in the fulfilling nature of labour and its rewards now, was in opposition to the regime's view of the peasant as production machine. The prevailing mood saw the peasant as a tool, an expendable tool if need be, to produce as a collective machine without regard to diminishing returns.

In 1923 he was appointed to direct the short-lived Petrograd Museum of Artistic Culture. The Communists shut it down in 1926 after announcing in their newspaper that the institute was "…a government-supported monastery rife with counter-revolutionary sermonizing." He remained in Petrograd, living in a small apartment with his new bride of one year, Natalia Andreyevna Manchenko. Malevich was in danger of losing his hard-won position among the most distinguished artists in Soviet Russia. He was ejected from his post as Director of the State Institute for Artistic Culture (GInKhuK) in 1926, and witnessed his students and colleagues shifted over to the ideologically approved State Institute of Art History (abbreviated "GII" for *Gosudarstvenniy Institut Istorii Iskusstv*).

In 1927 Malevich received permission to travel to Poland and Berlin, where seventy of his paintings were displayed in the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung (Great Berlin Art Exhibition). His work displayed in Berlin elicited interesting reviews, including this one from the Russian critic, A. V. Lunacharski:

"Russian artists have taken up a prominent position at the exhibition. First of all there is an enormous room dedicated to a retrospective, systematic exhibition of the oeuvre of our famous "Suprematist", Malevich.

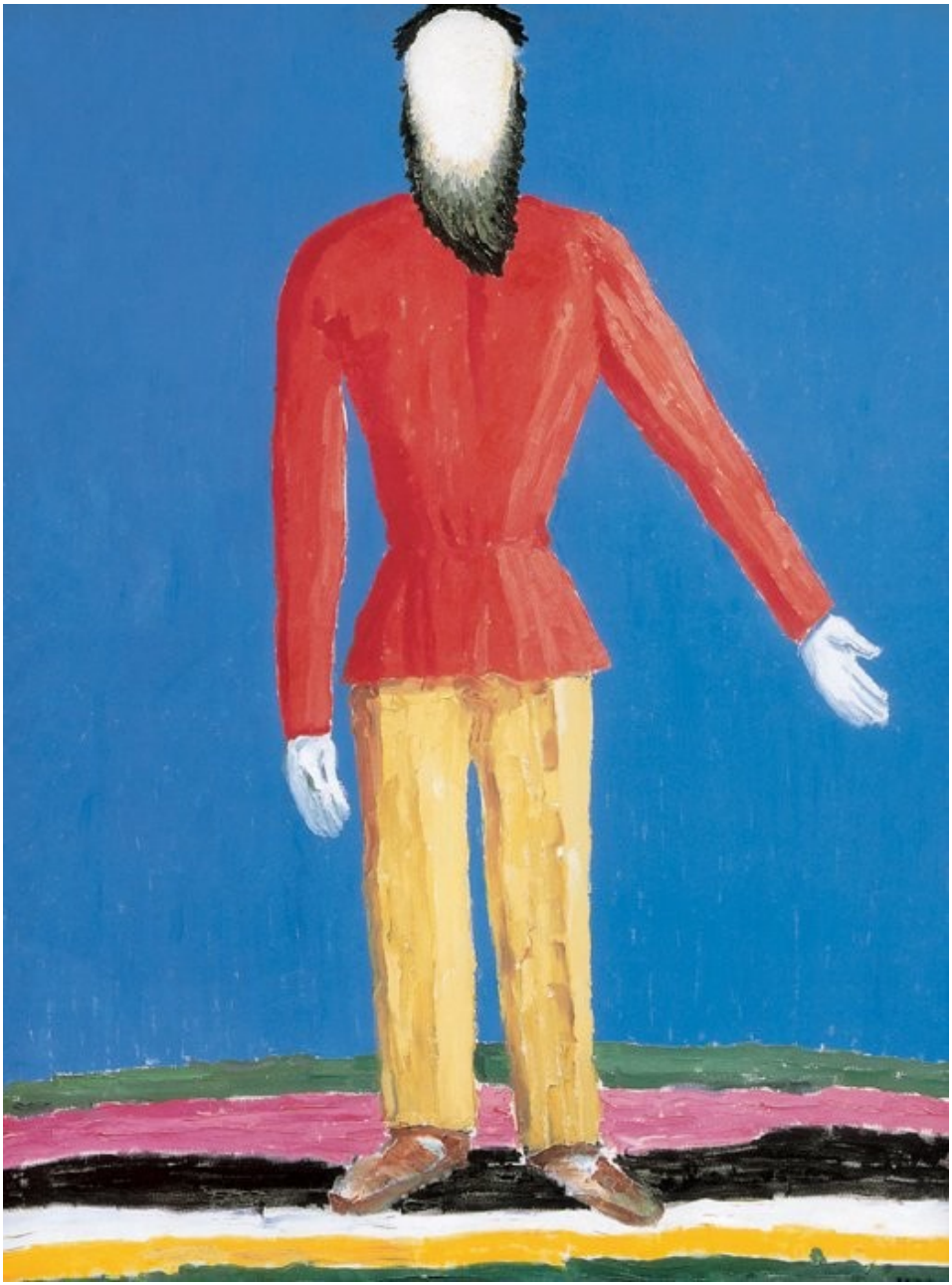
The artist Malevich, in spite of the exclusivity of his approach to painting is, of course, a great master. It is not surprising that in a country where the incomprehensible Kandinsky could be successful, the more synthetic and courageous Malevich would also find favour, especially after his present turn towards hard and harsh painting.

It is here that Malevich has been able for the first time to exhibit his work in a comprehensive manner…Severe and assiduous like his models, the icon and the "lubok", Malevich is at heart a classicist who does not permit his colours to intermingle and thus, so to speak, lose their essence.

In his genre Malevich has achieved considerable results and shown great skill. I don't know if such canvasses will be produced after him, but I am sure that his style, already applied by the late Popova as a decorative method, could have a great future in this respect.

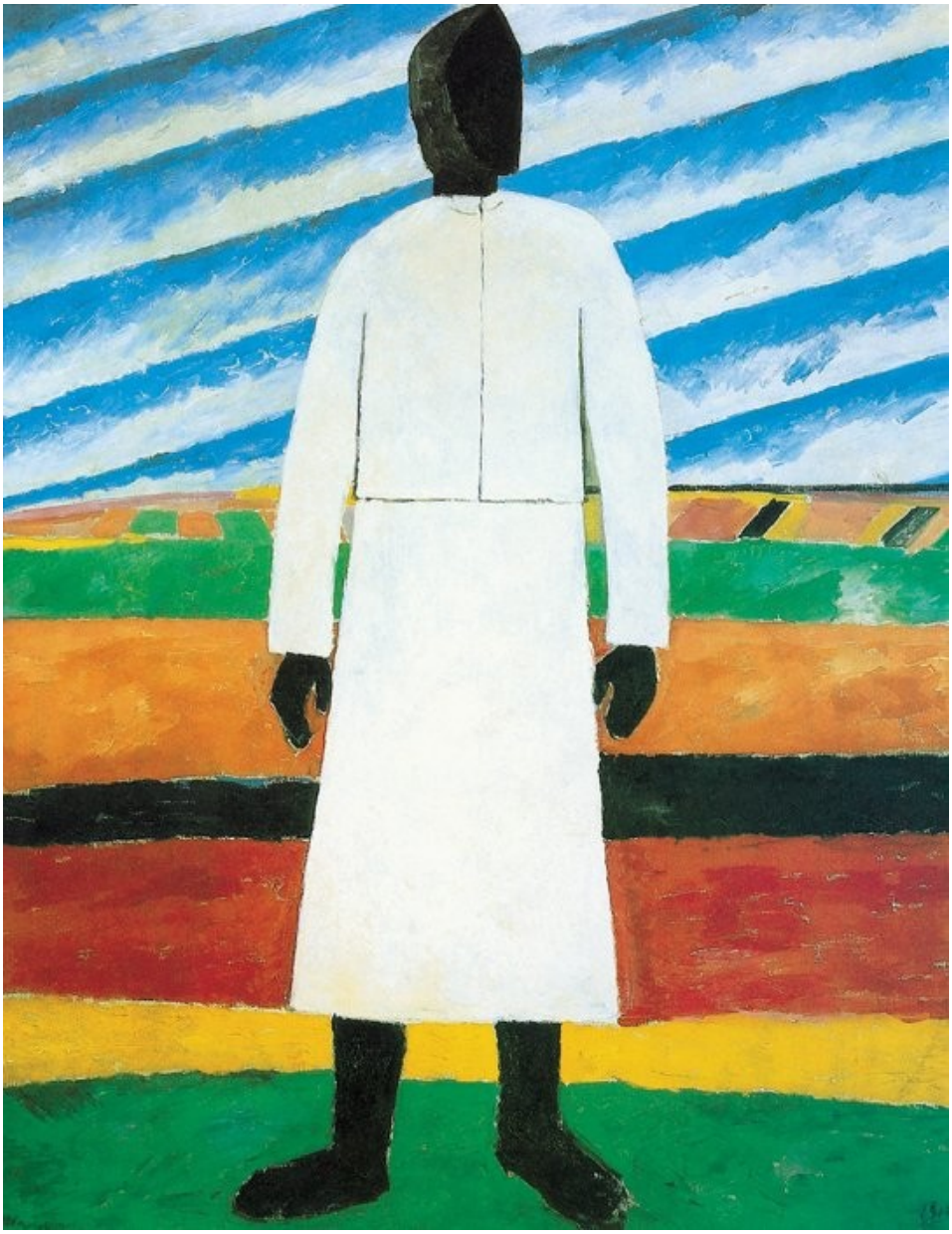
In Malevich's latest works exhibited in Berlin, he posits and resolves the same problems but in the piano, pianissimo rather than the forte mode. The works in question are very pale and practically one-toned. At times it seems that the surfaces – white-cream, pale pink, rough on smooth – can be differentiated by texture alone and not by colour.

It is possible not to value Malevich's paintings, that is, not receive any pleasure from them. Looking at his works, however, it is impossible not to recognize his talent, persistence and the existence of a system.



Peasant, c. 1931-1932.
Oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Two Figures in a Field, motif: 1911, version: 1929.
Oil on canvas, 53 x 70 cm. The State
Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Peasant with Black Face,
motif: 1911-1912, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 98.5 x 80 cm. The State
Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Two Masculine Figures,
motif: 1911, version: 1931-1932.
Oil on canvas, 99 x 79.5 cm. The State
Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Female Torso, motif: 1908-1909, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 72 x 52.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

His problem arises when Malevich stops painting and begins to write brochures. I heard that the Germans were also taken aback by his writings. I made an attempt to read the grandiloquent and obscure theoretical works by the leader of the “Suprematists”. In a confused manner he seems to try somehow to link his goals and path with the Revolution and God.”[38]

This criticism was not unfamiliar to Malevich, but he did revel in the fact that Western Europe was finally exposed to his work on a broad scale. It is not hard to imagine his excitement and anticipation in swapping ideas with the architects of the Bauhaus and look into the strange mind of Paul Klee or even the “incomprehensible Kandinsky”. His intention at first was to stay there for a lengthy period. He met with famous members of the Bauhaus movement in Dessau.

By 1927 the Bauhaus movement was famous in Europe for its effect on world art and design. Started by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919 and named with a reverse of the German term “House Construction” (*Hausbau*), the faculty was wide-ranging in its disciplines from the elegant symbolic worlds of artist Paul Klee, the design visualization of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, the fluid abstraction of Vassily Kandinsky and the industrial design functionalism of Marcel Breuer. For the boy who grew up in dirt-floor peasant houses with little formal education, surviving the rough scramble for survival in Russia and the Ukraine, the sophistication and blazing intellectualism permeating that institution must have been almost overwhelming. The new Bauhaus building alone, designed by Gropius, must have reminded Malevich of his architektons.

The glass curtain wall suspended in front of the load-bearing framework defined the exterior of the workshop wing and openly showed the constructive elements. Gropius, rather than visually amplifying the corners of the cubic body of the building, allowed the glass surface to overlap the edges, thereby creating the impression of lightness. Gropius consistently separated the parts of the Bauhaus building according to their functions and designed each differently. As though manipulating Suprematist geometrics, he thereby arranged the different wings asymmetrically – in relation to what is today the Bauhausstraße and the Gropiusallee respectively. In order to appreciate the overall design of the complex, the observer must therefore move around the whole building; there is no central viewpoint. Malevich would have responded to this virtual architekton floating in space.[39]

Despite the mutual respect between Malevich and the Bauhaus members, their approach to a creative result was in total opposition to his own concept of "pure art" with no utilitarian justification. Everyone who began studies at the Bauhaus began in architecture because their manifesto proclaimed that "…the ultimate aim of all creative activity is a building." This meant that students participated right from the start in practical construction projects. Following Gropius' directorship, Mies van der Rohe introduced a more aesthetics-based curriculum. But even that allowance failed the Malevich test. The Bauhaus faculty eventually included such artists as Lyonel Feininger, Franz Marc, Oskar Schlemmer, Georg Muche and Johannes Itten. Many of the principles it espoused before the original school closed in 1933 remain today in design and mass production products.

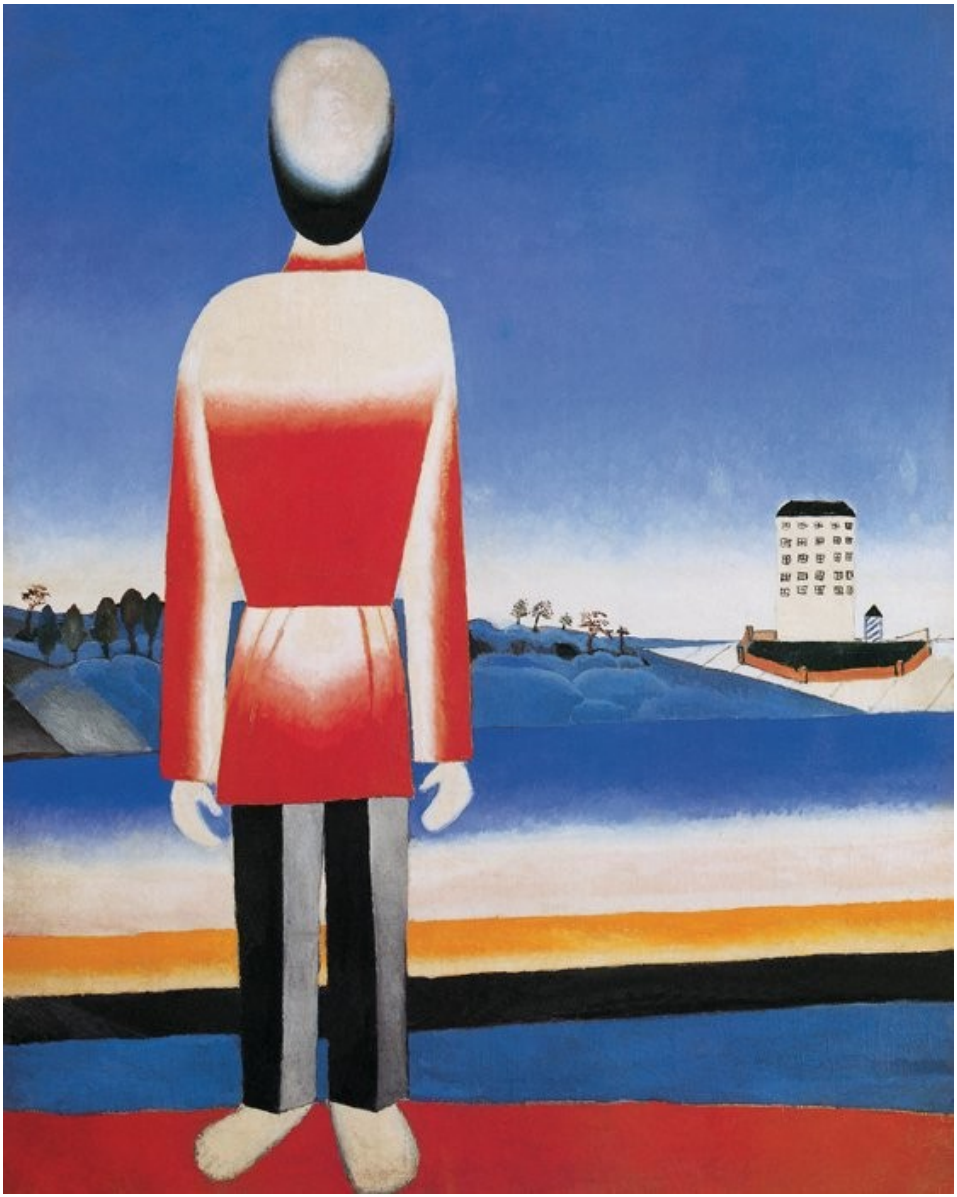
Back at the school, Malevich made plans to publish his book *The Non-objective World* as part of the Bauhaus book series. His trip outside Russia, bringing his one-man show to Warsaw and then to Berlin, had been a refreshing success. He must have travelled with one eye looking over his shoulder at the new attitudes concerning art and literature in his mother country. A recent show hung by the AKhRR in Moscow, *The Life and Being of the Peoples of the USSR*, consisting of 1,700 works hung by two hundred and ninety-eight artists, clearly reflected the Communist Party line concerning art – Socialist Realism Art – serving the Russian people. Abstract and non-objective painting and philosophical flights of metaphysical fancy beyond the coping power of the average rural peasant, or Party *apparatchik* had slipped from favour.

By 1927 Josef Stalin could not help but notice that the rest of the world was not exactly flocking to the Communist banner. In 1926 a General Strike of the so-called "Triple Alliance" of British labour, miners, railway workers and dock workers – nearly a million and a half workers – shut down the British economy for nine days. Troops were sent into the coalfields on April 15th, and the "Alliance" proved to be fragile under pressure. Soon only the miners remained out, but even their efforts collapsed in three months. Police intelligence, opening mail and monitoring phone calls convinced Prime Minister Baldwin's government that agents from the Soviet Union had provoked the action and infiltrated the British trades unions.

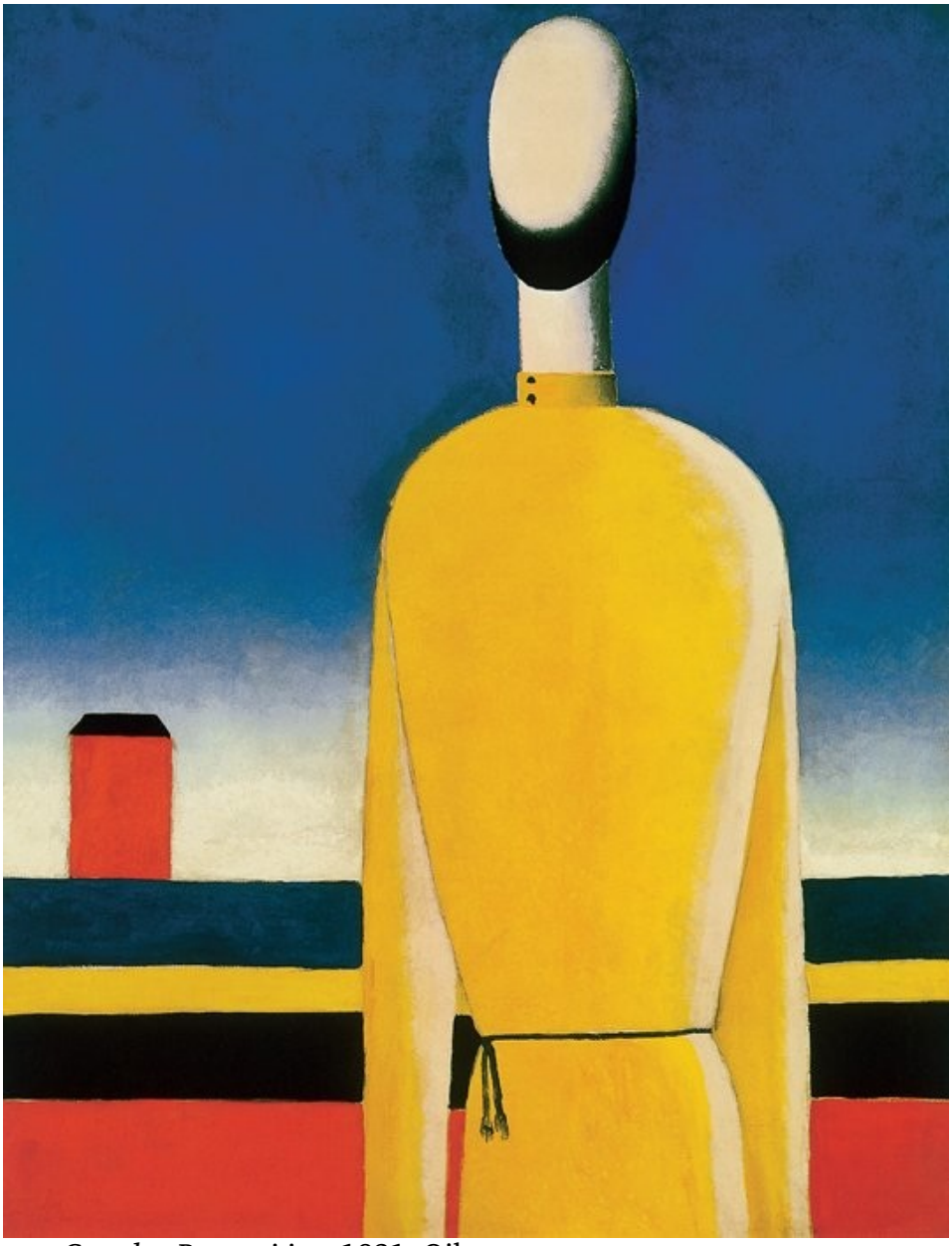
[38] A.V. Lunacharsky, *Russian Artists in Berlin, Ogonok*, 30 Nov. 1927, Vol. 2, p. 214-216, quoted from *Kasimir Malevich - Suprematism*, ed. Mathew Druit, Guggenheim Museum, 2003.

[39] www.bauhaus.de/English/index/html

Three Female Figures, 1928-1932.
Oil on canvas, 47 x 63.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.



Feeling of a Man in Jail, 1930-1931.
Oil on canvas, 98 x 78 cm. Location unknown.



Complex Premonition, 1931. Oil on canvas,
99 x 79 cm. The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Suprematist Transformation of Sportsmen, 1931.
Oil on canvas, 142 x 164 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

In the United States, capitalism was booming, but looking a bit unstable at the edges as so much wealth was in the hands of so few. Stock market manipulation was all too common. Communists and their sympathizers had been shipped out of the country by the boatload as a young J. Edgar Hoover got into his stride as a watchdog following the "Red Scare" of 1919-1920. Attorney-General Alexander Mitchell Palmer had pursued anyone even slightly tainted with Communism in his "Palmer Raids"‘ Hoover was his tool to rid the country of this menace.

Back home, the Bolshevik Revolution with its bloody purges had scoured the country from 1919 to 1923 and with Lenin's death in 1924, Leon Trotsky lost his protection and was eventually forced into exile beginning in 1927. Stalin moved step by step into power, but was

inheriting a country on the verge of collapse. Knowing Stalin favoured a centrist form of government power, the ideologue Nikolai Bukharin suggested that any stripping of surplus crops from the peasants – on which they lived – would cause a disastrous collapse of Russia's agriculture. Malevich had to support Bukharin's market-based New Economic Policy (NEP) that allowed peasants to keep their surplus production. Lenin had approved it in 1924. At the Fifteenth Communist Congress in October 1926, Stalin scrapped the plan and decided that all agricultural production belonged to the state. He set in motion a speeded-up quota system, collectivization of farms and modernization of all industry – ruled by decree from Moscow and enforced by troops if necessary.

In June 1927 the Committee of People's Commissars (SovNarKom) proclaimed the start of a Five Year Plan to begin industrialization of the country. That same month Malevich returned to Leningrad. He left his work with his friend, the architect Hugo Häring, and Häring's Russian-born wife. It was these paintings that would pass to the Stedelijk Museum some twenty-five years later. On departing from Berlin, he turned over many of his writings, including the manuscript of his book *Suprematism—The Non-Objective World*, to his hosts. Malevich had no illusions about what awaited him in the Soviet Union.

Malevich must have known that his own investment in the peasant culture, having lived with them, painted them and absorbed their ways in the context of 'nature' and work, was no longer in favour with the government's desire to use the peasant as a crude and disposable production machine. The iron decree that steam-rollered across the steppes promised only confusion and starvation.

Having experienced the fresh air and creativity of the Bauhaus, returning to the increasingly repressive Russian State must have saddened him. His conversations with the likes of Gropius and Le Corbusier in Dessau, and exchanging ideas with Hans Richter, Arp and Schwitters must have left him with an ache as he watched the attempts at modernization in the Soviet Union harden into bureaucratic impasses. The quality of life continued to slide precipitously into decline as little men struggled for power without thought to the consequences. The pace of the ideological game too must have seemed bewildering.

The Politburo had banished Trotsky and Zinoviev. They and seventy-five other members had been expelled from the Communist Party following the Fifteenth Congress in December 1927. And now the cries for reform and renunciation of Stalin's isolationist policies became

only disjointed muffled whispers from outside the government's core. With sole power in his hands following the death of Lenin in 1924 and Trotsky's expulsion, Josef Stalin inexorably began to turn to the left and aimed his weapons towards opposition to his demands for immediate industrialization.

Female Torso, motif: 1908-1910, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 58 x 47.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Suprematist Transformation of Two Figures,
1931-1932. Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 72 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Three Young Girls,
motif: 1910-1911, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 57 x 48 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Feeling of Danger, c. 1930-1931.
Oil on canvas, 78 x 65 cm. Musée national
d'Art moderne, centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

Malevich became aware of the erosion of his position in the Russian artistic community after losing his job as Director of the State Institute

of Artistic Culture (GinKhuK). He had seen his students trudge over to the "approved" State Museum of Art History. The recent memories of his trip out of Russia to Warsaw and Berlin, to the Bauhaus and the head-spinning conversations with some of the greatest living masters of art and design, were all he brought back to a Russia that was on the slippery slope of decline. Those who still clung to defending Trotsky and Zinoviev in the streets and with too-loud voices in the bars either vanished or found themselves sharing a garbage can of thin soup with a hundred close friends in a Siberian *gulag*. Even Bukharin found himself outside looking in as Stalin moved implacably toward rapid industrialization at whatever cost.

The "intelligentsia" who had run the country under the old system were an early target as a plot was allegedly uncovered in March 1928 at the Shakhti mines in the Donbass. During the troubled times of the Civil War, it was this area's fate to become a centre of the counter-revolution. Accused of working with foreign powers to sabotage the latest Five Year Production Plan, the technical experts at the mines were arrested. These experts refused to work with untrained bureaucrats and Party hacks in place of their trained subordinates. Curiously, these experts held the same type of job as had Malevich's father in the sugar beet refineries. Had he not been already dead, his life would probably have ended in front of a bullet-riddled wall or at the end of a short rope.

Team-work and 'equalization' (sharing of the wealth) among the proletarian classes were becoming requisite both in industry, agriculture and the arts. New legions of semi-educated young communists were drafted into the Party. Meanwhile Stalin had travelled through Siberia and the Urals, personally supervising the peremptory dismissal of local officials, the seizure of grain surpluses, and the thorough dressing-down of 'incompetent and cowardly' Party *apparatchiks*, whom he accused of being in league with *kulak* or rich-peasant profiteers. 'Modernity' both in politics and the arts was replaced with a drive for wealth-creating productivity alone.

In literature and the arts the mood was similar. Progressively, the best 'experts' and 'specialists' in painting, writing, sculpture or any specific aesthetic classification became an undesirable social group. Chagall, Kandinsky and others of that rank had fled Russia. Writers and artists streamed across the borders until leaving required permission and special papers. Was Malevich simply a fatalist, refusing to leave the land of his birth like a ship's captain remaining aboard his sinking vessel?

A group of Trotsky supporters tried to get a reading of his "secret

testament" written into the notes of that historic Fifteenth Congress which stated in part:

"Stalin is too rude, and this defect becomes intolerable in a Secretary General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post."

They were howled out of the Assembly and their colleagues sent into oblivion.

Little remains of Malevich's responses to these depredations, but while he did indeed bend with the despotic winds of change, he did not temper his energies in the promotion of Suprematism. He had written a series of articles on art in Ukrainian for the Kharkov monthly journal *Nova Generatsiia*, and had met editorial resistance and even the refusal of certain texts. *Nova Generatsiia (The New Generation)* was unquestionably the most successful and important avant-garde publication of the 1920s. It was not only the official organ of the Ukrainian Futurists, but a dynamic exponent of new artistic trends from a pan-European perspective.

Now he continued to write and also to paint, back-dating his newest paintings to earlier in his career in order to avoid suspicion of continuing to follow a semi-abstract or 'formalist' style. The paintings are intensely chromatic, using his former brilliant palette. They are largely symmetrical compositions, which show peasant figures as iconic types, suspended across the picture-plane in the manner of the designs he had done for his and Kruchyonykh's opera *Victory over the Sun* back in 1913, or for the first performance of Mayakovski's *Mystery-Bouffe*, produced by Meyerhold in 1918.

Malevich might have hoped that such paintings would be seen as sympathetic with the peasantry and with the spirit of folk art. At the end of 1929 however, when the 'new' works and others were exhibited together at a retrospective at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, they were met with scathing criticism from the Tretyakov's own director, Alexei Fedorov-Davydov. When the show travelled on to Kiev the director of the Kiev Art Gallery, Fedor Kumpan was arrested and bundled off to prison. It took Malevich two-and-a-half years to retrieve the impounded works.

Landscape with a White House, 1928-1929.
Oil on canvas, 59 x 59.2 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Red House, 1932. Oil on canvas, 63 x 55 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Red Cavalry, spring-summer 1932.
Oil on canvas, 91 x 140 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

His works dating from 1927 to 1930 can be viewed as a conciliatory gesture to preserve the position he had attained in the world of Russian art, a position that by now had reached the periphery of international recognition through shows of his work outside Russia. He reverted to a former style and palette, to a former perspective and to subject matter long linked to his interpretation, the life of the peasant farmer. But he reverted only so far. As the ringing Kremlin approval of benign Socialist Realism began to snuff out the avant-garde Soviet artists, or send them packing to decadent Paris and the United States, Malevich, using his symbolist vocabulary, reverted only to his pre-Suprematist non-objective style and took up the peasant cause.

To the Harvest II (Marfa and Vanka) (1928-1929) was a compilation of works from his earlier period, back in 1912, and was taken from a pencil sketch made at that time. His other work, *Peasant Woman with Buckets and Child* discussed earlier was also recalled. In the

original drawing Marfa, the woman, is one of four women heading for the fields and she carries two small water-buckets. Vanka, her child, is at her side. The women have faces and each carries a harvesting implement. The 1927 painting has subtle differences.

For the figures of the woman and her child, Malevich has retreated to his "polished tin" palette of black edging into white without regard for directionality of the light. Now, after Suprematism, the trapezoids that comprise the woman and child's upper torsos and lower skirts seem to be Suprematist planes dissolving from being to "not-being." The two figures march forward, but they are disappearing from tangible forms into the infinity of white, the nothingness of death. Their heads are simple spheres on their rounded shoulders, spheres without features or identities. These is some art work, a bit of decoration on the woman's wooden shoes that, in Malevich's mind, makes her "Marfa".

In 1912, the woman and child were joining the other women on the trek to the fields. In the later work the women are in the distance harvesting and stacking the wheat bales on the blood-red ground. They are faceless. Their distance from the woman with the child seems to give perspective to the bands of colour that rise as a two-dimensional wall, but they seem embedded in the very shallow depth of view. The looming woman that fills the entire canvas from her heel to the top of her head now seems less a neighbour and more a threat as she brings food to the harvesters.

In another work representing peasants in the fields, *Haymaking* gives us the same character as the woodcutter in an earlier work, but now he confronts us. Like Marfa, the harvester fills the frame with the "tin man" colours that now suggest mortality. But where the earlier woodcutter was an element in a claustrophobic jumble of a two-dimensional woodpile, our scythe-wielding protagonist here carries the tools of his trade, fronting a deep-set background that retreats to a far horizon. The peasant in his shirt, bowl-haircut and gag-like beard stares at us with dead eyes around a tri-colour nose that hangs like a decoration from his brow.

Other fieldhands share the canvas at midpoint and in the distance, but their costumes seem less real and more like those he designed for the stage plays. They carry twine to bind the bales, but he is the harvester, the cutter of stalks. He shaves the field with his sharp tool. He is the artist. The others must deal with his work. Like the icons of his youth, Malevich gives his harvester the look of both worldly value in his spread-leg stance and other-worldly promise in his direct stare. He

would be at home looking down from a peasant's dining room wall.

If Malevich saw the harvester as artist, he sees him as Jesus in *The Head of a Peasant*. Here is the modern icon, sewn with peasant life in a montage of village scenes drawn straight from his youth. Dominating the front and centre of the canvas is his symbolic face of the of the peasant broken down into its iconic components of bowl-haircut divided into equal flanks of black and grey, the white face surrounding two eyes with grey pupils cradling blue eyes of lapis lazuli. The nose casts a golden shadow. The mouth lies behind a solid beard – also equally divided into black and grey to match the hair – that allows no speech to pass.

Female Portrait, motif: 1909, version: 1928-1929.
Oil on plywood, 58 x 49 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Head of a Woman No. 6 A, c. 1932-1933.
Oil on canvas, 34 x 23.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Abstract Portrait, 1933.
Oil on canvas, 35.3 x 30.1 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Girl with a Red Pole, 1932.
Oil on canvas, 71 x 61 cm.
The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

The head sits on a cloak divided into red and fuchsia halves split by a golden button row. Behind the head, a red post rises to the edge of the

frame and is the same colour as two bands of red that flank the head at the ears suggesting a near-by cross. A peasant Eden plays out behind the solitary portrait. Rows of homes of white stucco with red tiled roofs and fields of baled hay mounds are punctuated by flower-strewn meadows. Green trees share the village streets and a cluster of women pass by a harvested field.

This painting is on wood – typical of Russian icons – and clearly represents a familiar icon, *Head of Christ*, first painted in the fifteenth century and found in many Russian homes. While the actual icon portrays a severe, demanding Christ, the Peasant Holy Man is more of the people and not a plaster deity or gilded saint. He is Everyman seeking the justice that is his due because he works the land.

From his work it is not hard to observe that Malevich had good days and bad days. Even to hang these later works he had to resort to backdating them to pre-Revolutionary times, 1905, 1909, etc. How must it have been for this man to watch his world shrink as the grinding wheels of government mandates and bureaucracy continued to encapsulate creativity and subjugate it to the needs of the state? How many friends had disappeared? He had no money to speak of and food shortages made every day a search for something on the shelves to put in the pot. As his ability to provide diminished, the price of bread – the Soviet staple – climbed. Fifty kilograms of bread cost 13.5 roubles in January 1934; by April the price had climbed to 27 roubles and by January 1935 Soviet citizens paid 60 roubles for their bread.[40]

Bad days clearly began to dominate his work as daily life kept dissolving away the plane on which he lived.

Stalin's Five Year plan had been approved by the Sixteenth Party Congress in April 1929. Russia's peasants were expected to increase production by fifty-five per cent extracted mostly from collective farms. Celebrating his fiftieth birthday in December 1929, Stalin spoke to a Conference of Marxist Agrarians. He explained that the *kulak*'s time was over. The rich-peasant who managed state lands and took his cut now became part of the vast proletariat. Individual owning of farms and land had come to an end and all agriculture would be gathered into "Collectives" responsible for meeting quotas set by the government. Now, for the officials sitting in the audience who oversaw the collectives, they would, in turn, be responsible to the Kremlin – and ultimately to the bloody hands of Stalin – for meeting those quotas. The alternative to missing a quota was service to the State by hard labour or exchanging their desk and automobile for counting chickens and

cabbages in the corner of a horse stall for a bowl of rye porridge. Fear of being accused of "right wing deviation" ruled the Duma.

Kasimir Malevich's fate was tied directly to this fear. The new *diktats* swept across the country and resistance was futile for the isolated villages on the steppes as well as for the industrial cities that had lost their autonomy to the iron grip of state control. The great fear was deportation; not deportation out of Russia, but deportation north into the frozen landscape of Siberia and the *gulags* (work camps). As the *kulaks* vanished into the camps or disappeared into the earth, their possessions were kept from the peasants who remained on the land. There was no incentive to win or lose, only to tread the fields or the workshops in hopeless fear of being accused of some small infraction.

Millions felt the heel of the government's boot, but in the rural districts and among the former land-owners and sharecroppers on the fertile steppes resistance flared. Peasants slaughtered their own livestock rather than surrender it to the collective farms: between 1928 and 1933, it is estimated that over forty-five per cent of all cattle and horses and over sixty per cent of all sheep were killed. Instead of efficiency and prosperity, famine, misery and disease swept the country. Roads and railways were jammed with peasants and *kulaks* fleeing, or searching for work in the cities after torching their farms, or wandering into the countryside after losing their jobs in the factories. *Kommissars* and secret police seemed to be everywhere, checking papers, making arrests, dragging dissenters off to the Lubianka prison where their screams were muffled by thick concrete walls.

The continuing job shifts as a wandering populace sought work and shelter caused unwanted surpluses to burgeon in places while other markets dried up. Skills disappeared for want of use and other skills were never learned because of lack of employment. Layers of inspectors, administrators, commissars and other paper pushers multiplied. Families were separated and morality slid downhill even where the icons looked down on the changing scene.

Even as the government flung itself at increasing industrialization, the under educated and widely disposed population centres without proper communications or transportation for products or information failed to keep up and slipped further into chaos. In the Duma, bureaucrats hinted to Stalin that easing up might be called for, but in a speech to an assembly of industrial overseers in February 1931 he said:

"It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slacken the tempo, to slow down the movement. No comrades, it is not possible…

We are fifty to one hundred years behind the advanced countries (of Western Europe and the USA). We must make good this distance within ten years. Either we do so, or we will be crushed!"

Of course writers and artists could not remain untouched by this cataclysm. In fact, they were particularly vulnerable to excesses of finger pointing and exclamation, especially among the art groups who had banded together since the Revolution. Manifestos by their nature are all-or-nothing declarations of creative principles. As with Malevich and his acolytes and many of the self-proclaimed movement leaders, rarely did a show of paintings arrive upon a wall without an accompanying wad of text explaining how or why these images defined the ultimate in creative expression. Spurred on by Lenin's 1921 New Economic Policy, a number of the fine arts groups had forged bonds in solidarity with various trade unions and the military. When the NEP was tossed out and its more active supporters marched off to walled asylums for "mental re-direction," power-grabbing commissariats blossomed. The lockstep tread of government control did not spare the creative community. The Soviet artists who did not have well-connected patrons – who survived at the edge of poverty even in the best of times – were particularly sensitive to travelling north in cattle cars to chop down trees in some distant Arctic forest. Denunciations on political and moral grounds became rampant as the groups sought with desperation to discover the government's fine arts policy and to conform.

By the early 1930s, as the Great Depression began sweeping around the globe, determining Soviet fine arts policy was not unlike trying to nail gelatin to a tree. Social Realism was a vague term begging a more precise definition. Even the concept of "realism" offered wide interpretation, considering the technical and stylistic approaches available. In its wisdom, the Communist regime further muddied the waters by reversing its "proletarianization" of the populace – everyone dipping their bowls into the same gruel bucket. Instead, the word came down that everyone would be paid what their skills were worth – and some folks were more equal than others.

This reversal caught everyone off guard. The government apparently thought the artists, industrial managers, goatherds and philosophers no longer had the power to sabotage the Party. So now it was time for a reward to those true believers who had done a good job of dedicating their lives and skills to the Socialist team. Rather than hammer down the technical and cultural intelligentsia, it was more profitable to seek their co-operation. All this while the rest of the world

went bankrupt.

During the early 1930s, not a lot of Soviet artists produced art. Many of them spoke out, talked, proselytized and proclaimed, but it was easier to retract words or forget an offending phrase than to deny a piece of art on a wall or planted on a plinth. Until 1931, teamwork was the watchword – "team" as in all smiles in the fields and behind the collective plough, shoulder-to-shoulder at the tractor factory, and we're all pulling together to keep the trains running. Not a lot of room for the artist to exert much "creativity". However, as the "experts" and their implied hierarchies were once again fed into the system with the new policy, some control began to be asserted, some guidelines.

During the all-talk-and-no-art period, strong proclamations were issued by the art groups that made them sound more like militias: "mobilize!" "battlegrounds", "victory", "defeat" and "shock troops".[41] This rhetoric tempered as the Party softened its stand on vigorous conformity and emphasized "co-operation" between artists and writers, a unification of the arts. Political and social priorities shifted from the stick to the carrot and, in 1932, beautiful old antiques were pried out of storage.

[40] Erich Wollenberg, *The Abolition of the Bread Cards in the Soviet Union,* "New International", Vol.2 No. 2, March 1935, p. 73-74, transcribed & marked up by Einde O'Callaghan for ETOL.

[41] Brandon Taylor, Research Fellow in Contemporary Art at Southampton Solent University. His publications include Art and Literature under the Bolsheviks, 2 volumes, Pluto, London, 1991 and 1992, and The Art of Today, Weidenfeld, London, 1995.

Head of a Contemporary Young Girl, 1932.
Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 34.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Portrait of Angelika Manchenko, 1934.
Oil on canvas, 99.5 x 74.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Portrait of E. Yakovleva, c. 1932.
Oil on canvas, 82 x 64 cm. Private Collection.

Female Worker, 1933. Oil on canvas, 71.2 x 59.8 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The paintings of Ilya Repin were dusted off following his death in 1930 and members of the once proud *Peredvizhniki* were resurrected. Writers were herded together to form an alliance that supported the Party platform with promises that a similar “alignment” of artists would

occur. The Central Committee's new policy for the arts called up the sacred cow of 'tradition" around which to rally.[42]

Malevich found himself hunted by critics no matter which way he turned. Anyone who had shown any sympathy toward the *kulaks*, peasants, priests, the intelligentsia and those who had voted for the NEP now had suspicions levelled at their heads. Even his latest exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in 1929 had been savaged by terrified contemporaries led by prominent artists such as Constructivist Alexei Gan. Along with Varvara Stepanova, Gan had proclaimed Constructionism as the "creation of communistic expression of material structures" which creations were to be defined by three major elements: tectonics, *faktura* (texture), and construction, by which they meant the process of organization and structuring materials.[43]

Because of these suspicions of treasonable deviation from the Party Line, Malevich was scooped up and locked away between September and December 1930 for intense rounds of questioning. Of particular interest were his contacts in Germany, as that country was in the process of transferring its governing practices from democracy to fascism under their new chancellor, Adolf Hitler, elected in 1933. Hitler and his National Socialists, or Nazis, descended upon that odious bastion of free-thinking creativity, the Bauhaus and had it destroyed to the last brick. For Malevich, the real heat came from accusations that he had blatantly courted "formalism." He, on many occasions, had favoured colour, line, design and technique over the approved standard for an acceptable painting, that of "content".

Transferred from a Party cell to a damp basement workroom in the Russian Museum, Malevich saw his station in life slide down the slippery slope toward artistic oblivion in the spring of 1932. But even as he was allowed to continue work, his paintings were "re-examined" in their descriptions to reflect their place in the grand traditional scheme fostered by the new fine arts policy. The Russian Museum exhibition *Artists of the Russian Federation over Fifteen Years*, which opened in Leningrad during November 1932, for example, was a straightforward look at Russian art. Malevich received a large cubicle of his own. Another cubicle was given to Pavel Filonov, another former traditional painter seduced by the creative rush of producing non-objective work.

When the exhibition reached Moscow, Malevich was gone from the walls and Filonov had been pared to the bone. Filonov's dedication to his work and concepts caused him to refuse to sell his work to collectors. His goal was to create a Museum of "Analytical Realism". All

his works were given to the Russian Museum to be hung in his new museum later. He starved to death during the Siege of Leningrad of September 1941 to January 1944.

As a consequence of the Leningrad version of the *Fifteen Years* show, the organizer, Nikolai Punin, found himself removed from the Moscow organizing committee and his article on *Russian Modernism and the Influences of Western Art* expurgated from the show catalogue. What remained was a testament to Stalin's club of best friends, including a pantheon of realists: Kilment Vorshilov, Isaak Brodsky, Evgeni Katsman, and Alexandr Gerasimov. The writer Maxim Gorky was also included in this select number even though he had spent much time behind bars denouncing government policies and was kicked out of the country by Lenin in 1921. From his exile in Germany and, later, Italy he continued his criticism. Invited to return to Russia by Stalin in 1928, Gorky managed to save the lives of many Russian writers by intervening on their behalf. Eventually his welcome wore thin. In 1936 the world learned that he had died of a heart attack, but in 1938 an NKVD (secret police) agent was convicted of his murder.

These are the kind of intrigues Malevich faced as he continued painting into the 1930s. His work lost its precision and he adopted a very brushy Expressionist style. His only revolt against the government and lockstep art groups' efforts to make him a non-person lay in his use of symbolism. The Communists distrusted symbolism and they distrusted the intelligentsia who might interpret the hidden meanings locked in oil paint. So, in this case, the dullard commissars of creativity granted Kasimir some time.

[42] 'O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizitsii', 1932, in I. Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let. materialy i dokumentatsiya,* Moscow-Leningrad 1933, p. 288-290; cited in Taylor, *Art and Literature Under the Bolsheviks*, p. 181-182.

[43] Iakov Chernikhov, *The Architectural Culture of Revolutionary Russia*, Division of Research and Advanced Studies of the University of Cincinnati, 2002.

Portrait of Nikolai Punin, 1933.
Oil on canvas, 69 x 57 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Portrait of Natalia Malevich, 1933.
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 55.5 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

In Peasants, painted in 1929, three men in peasant attire look out at the viewer with their backs to a field and the deep blue sky. They have no faces, but are bearded, and they have no arms. The first

interpretation is that they are unable to earn a living because of government collectivization of their farms and confiscation of all their production. The other interpretation is that their arms are tied behind their backs and they are awaiting the firing squad. The anonymity marks them as any Russian or Ukrainian farmers.

The Russian poet Osip Mandelstam wrote a poem in 1932 calling Stalin a “peasant-slayer”. He and his wife were arrested in 1936 and he died in a labour camp of an “unspecified illness” in 1938. Malevich was marching in the same shoes, but to keep the NKVD from his door for the time being, he dated his works completed in the late 20s and 30s to an earlier period. *Peasants* thus bore the date 1909.

A strident bearded armless peasant steps forward as though defending the government seizure of a fine white horse behind him in *Untitled (Man and a Horse)* 1928-1929. His cloak, cinched at the waist, is bright red above black trousers over Moroccan red boots. He fills the canvas from top to bottom and remains faceless to the world. Here again, the style is brushy with short strokes scrubbed into the canvas.

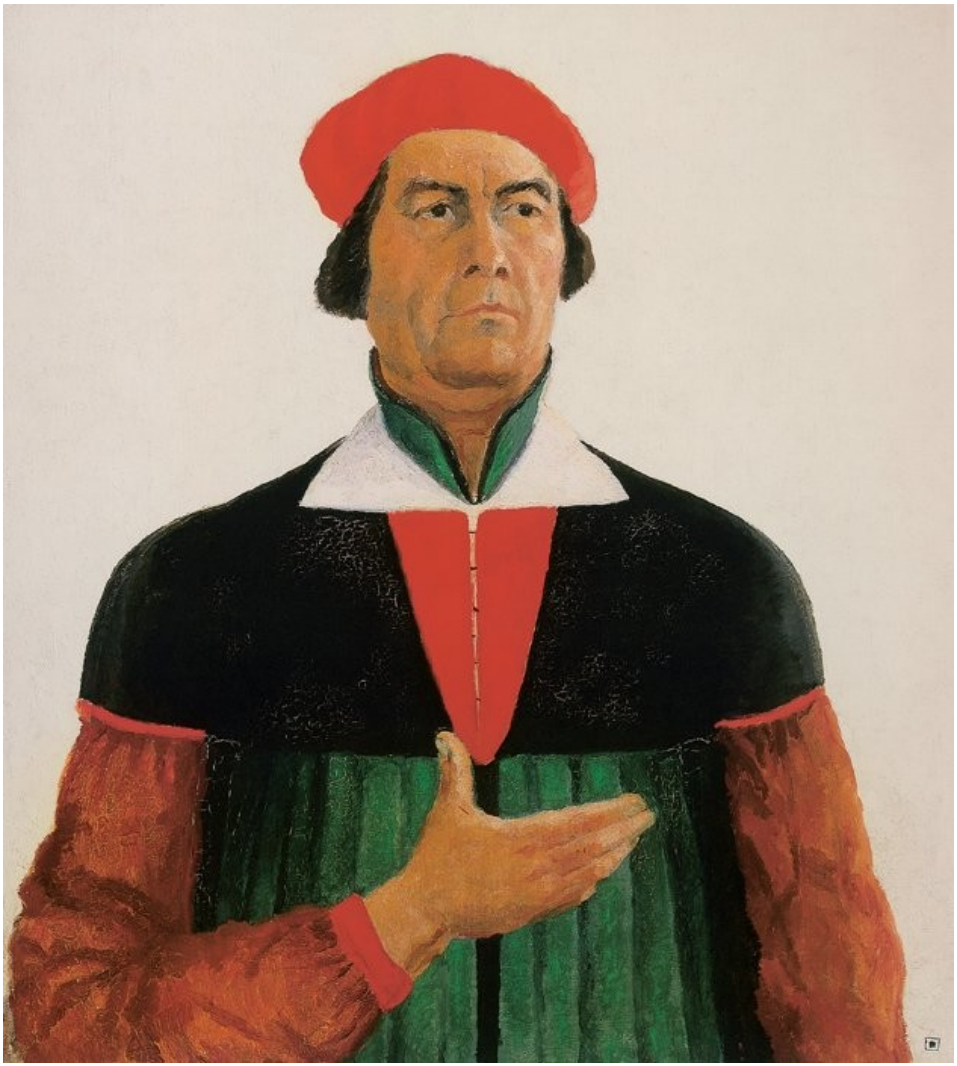
His *Untitled (Man Running)* continues in this vein, but here the action is arrested in mid-stride as a black-faced man with a silver beard and hair freezes as he crosses the canvas. Beneath and behind his bare black feet, horizontal strips of layered strata stand in for the land topped by a harvested field. On the horizon, two dormered buildings stand before a blue sky. Between them is a bloodied, silver sword with the tip pointing down. If that wasn’t enough for the anti-church Communists, the big red cross behind the running man’s outstretched arm leaves little to the imagination. For all his delving into the work of various philosophers, mystics, agnostics and atheists, Malevich remained a true believer in the Church and redemption. He – the runner, the peasant, Malevich – runs past the cross as though to some sanctuary beyond the edge of the frame.

This style was a conscious choice, not a result of poor health or any nervous disorder, as would be proved before his allotted days ran their course. His Red House (1932) drops a simple Suprematist red rectangle topped by a black roof punctuated with three dots of white dabbed in place as windows into horizontal strata. The fields in winter are layered in bands of white and beige, grass green, the yellow of a harvested plain, the ever-present black road of his youth and the cloud-streaked variegated blue sky. The isolation of this bit of peasant architecture may be attributed to the wok of Georgio de Chirico, whom Malevich studied and admired.

As a believer in the 1917 Revolution and the broad concept of returning the land to the people in the academic sense of Communism – not the dog-eat-dog bloody muddle that actually happened – Malevich sought to find metaphysical symbols that fulfilled the revolutionary promise. This house and the other symbolic canvasses of the 1930s became part of that search.

Cleaning up his brushwork, Malevich kept his metaphysical creations faceless and placed them carefully in disciplined context within the canvas. Complex Premonition (1931) places a head-to-hips figure in the foreground but right of centre, allowing a red house to secure the horizon above the bands of land strata. The head and neck are smooth shapes above a two-button collar. The torso has arms but no hands, and a beard is suggested by the shading of the chin. This sentinel is formidable, as though possessing more than simple peasant presence; he represents a religious guise, a monk or redeemer.

Substitution for religious significance comes again in *The Athletes*, painted between 1931-1932. Here, an innocent enough line-up of multicoloured faceless figures are presented in cookie-cutter fashion as repetitions of one character. These harlequins stand against Suprematist infinity of the white canvas, suggesting there is more to be expected from this confrontation. Indeed, a contemporary Russian would have tumbled to the four figures as resembling the four “Selected Saints” from the fifteenth century Russian icon. While the saints make the signs of the blessing, these four “athletes” stand poised as if on starting blocks to begin a race.



Self-Portrait, 1933. Oil on canvas, 73 x 66 cm.
The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Portrait of Ivan Kliun, 1933.
Oil on cardboard, 29 x 31 cm.
Private Collection, Moscow.

But, as stated earlier, the Communists distrusted symbols, even ones that seemed to positively exhort the populace to great striving in the name of Socialism. Many artists, including Malevich, had difficulty getting their work displayed let alone purchased. Any ambiguity of message was enough for disqualification. In 1933, Malevich planned to publish a book in collaboration with the writer Nikolai Karzhiyev

featuring Russian Futurism. At the same time, he gave Karzhiyev pages from a proposed autobiography.

Neither the Futurist book nor the autobiography was ever published. At this time, with his fortunes in disarray, Malevich was struck down with cancer. He had done all he could to compromise with the ruling powers, but his past condemned his future. In flashes of the fear he had denounced so many times in Suprematist writings, "craftsmanship", he revisited his Impressionist roots. As usual, Malevich could not simply explore the style, he had to create a deep study translated into a long manuscript that coincided with his teaching position at the Central House of the Arts in Leningrad. The job kept a roof over his head and food on the table for his family. He had left a number of works in Germany and decided to replace some of them with back-dated new canvasses. The backdating lifted the curse of "new" heresies attributed to him and kept the wolves at bay.

The Unemployed Girl might have been titled in keeping with the world's economic condition in 1929 as the Great Depression began spreading through banks and stock brokerages. But even here, he could not take a break. Though the Communists decried the capitalism that now seemed in desperate straits, they still needed trading partners and purchasing credit from countries outside the sphere of Communist influence. Also, the suggestion that everyone wasn't sharing the Communist dream did not win him friends. The portrait of the girl in search of a job, dressed in her city-best and masterfully composed on a park bench within a serene palette dictated by the city grass and trees, kept his critics tut-tutting.

Among his last works, Malevich turned to portraiture. Being who he was, the images he cast in paint are not just simple likenesses but are encoded messages to a world that had noted him briefly and then moved on. His third wife was his model for portraits of the *Artist's Wife, Natalia Andreyevna Manchenko* in 1933 and again under just her name in 1934. The difference between the two is striking.

In the 1933 painting, Natalia has the pale profile look of a Medici and the costume appears to be Italian as well. She gestures with her right hand in the direction she is facing – an iconic move. On her head she wears a knitted cap around which circles a gold band – a halo? The colours of her tunic with its red pleated skirt, its belted waist and chest closure are those of Suprematism. A pair of joined rectangles creates a closure at the neck. She stands in black limbo and in the bottom left corner of the canvas; Malevich has signed the work with his signature

square outlined in white.

A year later, he created another portrait of Natalia. In this portrait, she is less the symbol and more the person in a blue and white dress trimmed broadly in red. The dress seems antique and the brooch at her bosom is a white oval containing two joined rectangles. Natalia carries either an accordion file folder or an expandable brown handbag. It is a very pedestrian prop.

Her face reveals the strain of their life together and his volatile relationship with the quirky brutal government bureaucracy, but there is strength in the set of the chin and the firm mouth.

Having explored the future with non-objective symbolism and given nodding acknowledgement to Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism and Impressionism along the way, Malevich chose to rest his case in history. He gave the world a final look at his own face in *The Artist (Self-Portrait)* in 1933, but as a fifteenth century man painted in the manner of Holbein or Dürer.

Once again, he chose the iconic Christ-like gesture of the extended right hand, but with his face turned to the left. He has assumed the identity of an artist at a time when they were prized by great mentors and accorded honours in their lifetime. Defiantly, he signed his likeness with the black square. Kasimir Malevich used – to all appearances – the Party-approved realist *métier* to bring home his view of both himself, his art and his culture at a time when the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers met in 1934 to strike out at all "formalism, mysticism and bourgeois pessimism" because they were "…incompatible with the tasks of building socialism".

Forty years after Malevich's death, a former pupil, Anna Leposkaya, wrote:

"After Suprematism and with its assistance, Malevich's urge towards colour found expression in a new, enriched interpretation ... these new works [of the 1930s] should not be regarded as an unexpected or new course of development, but as the evolution of the colour principle germane to Malevich's early works ... This constitutes the spiritual content of Kazimir Severinovich, powerful and deep, rich in its unity."[44]

This period in his life has scant documentation. From the sparse surviving evidence we can surmise that Malevich's response to these extreme conditions was two-fold at least. He had recently written a series of articles on art in Ukrainian for the Kharkov monthly journal *Nova Generatsiia*, and had met editorial resistance and even the refusal

of certain texts. His health deteriorated as cancerous tumours erupted in his body, and an appeal to the Communist Party's Central Committee requesting permission to obtain adequate food, doctors and seek medical treatment in the West was refused. A loyal cadre of supporters and friends stuck with him despite the dangers of association and his estrangement from the ossifying Soviet Art World.

He died on 15 May 1935. A memorial service was conducted in the Leningrad House of Artists. A procession then wound its way down Leningrad's Nevsy Prospect to the Moscow railway station. He was taken by train to where his ashes were buried near his *dacha* outside Moscow. The Leningrad City Council paid for the funeral.

No architekton was erected, nor a telescope pointing at Jupiter as he had requested. Instead, a concrete black square marked his grave until the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) erased all traces of his memorial, and Soviet authorities stripped his name from all references to Russian art. In 1988, the Year of *Perestroika*, a new grave marker bearing a red square was erected near his grave-site and from museum walls his vision once more looked out at those willing to see.

According to the records of the Russian Museum:

"After Malevich's death in May 1935, his relatives were awarded a certificate of inheritance, stating that they inherited, in equal shares, "various fixtures and fittings, a grand piano, paintings and other items of estimated value fifteen-thousand three-hundred and fifty-five roubles, in accordance with the bailiff's deed of inventory No. 1343 dated 29 May 1935.

Malevich's legatees were named as Natalia Andreyevna Malevich (his widow); his daughter Una (Anna) Kazimirovna (born 1920); Lyudviga Alexandrovna Malevich (his mother); Galina Kazimirovna Sokolova (his daughter from his first marriage); and Galina's children (Malevich's grandchildren) Igor Nikolayevich Sokolov (born 1922) and Ninel Nikolaevna Sokolova (born 1927).

"In March 1936, five of Malevich's official heirs (with the exception of fourteen-year-old Igor Sokolov) moved ninety-four of the artist's paintings and drawings to the Russian Museum for temporary storage. Three works were later returned to the owners. The Russian Museum also holds other pictures by Malevich, transferred by his family in 1936. Not one single work has ever been sold or exchanged.

"None of Malevich's relatives showed any interest in his works after 1936. On the contrary, as Vassily Pushkarev recalled, they attempted to distance themselves both from Malevich's name and his œuvre."[45]

During the last major exhibition of his works at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2004, his oils commanded as much as $15 million apiece in today's market.

Kasimir Severinovich Malevich, an artist of the Ukraine, at last discovered the other side of his great white infinity.

[44] A.Leporskaya, '*The Beginnings and the End of Figurative Painting - and Suprematism*', in Kasimir Malewitsch zum 100. Geburtstag, Cologne, Galerie Gmurzynska, 1978, p. 69.

[45] http://.rusmuseum.ru/eng/editions

Portrait of Una, 1930-1933.
Oil on canvas, 52 x 42.4 cm.
Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

Biography

1878: Kasimir Malevich is born on February 23 to Polish parents, Severyn and Liudvika Malewicz. His father works in a sugar beet processing plant.

1890: The family moves to the village of Parhomovka. Over the next few years, the young Malevich observes the art of the local peasants, who decorate their homes.

1896: The family moves to Kursk in Russia, where Malevich's father begins a job as a clerk in a railway company. Malevich organizes an art circle with other art enthusiasts, and joins his father's office as a draughtsman in order to earn money to fund his art studies.

1901: Malevich marries Kazimira Zgletta.

1904-05: He travels to Moscow several times, and studies icons in particular as part of his artistic development.

1906: He studies under Fedor Rerberg.

1907-08: Malevich takes part in several exhibitions of the "Society of Artists of Moscow".

1909: He marries his second wife, Sofia Mikhailovna Rafalovich.

1910: Malevich submits several works to the first Jack of Diamonds exhibition in Moscow, organized by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova.

1912: He takes part in the Neo-Primitivist exhibition, The Donkey's Tail. He later meets the artist Mikhail Matyushin for the first time; this is the beginning of a lifelong friendship. At the end of the year he contributes to the fifth exhibition of the "Union of Youth" in St. Petersburg.

1913: He becomes a member of the artists' group "Union of Youth". Later in the year, Malevich, Matyushin and Kruchenikh publish their *Futurist Manifesto*. In December, the opera *Victory over the Sun* created by Malevich with writers Velemir Khlebnikov and Alexander Kruchenikh is shown in St. Petersburg. Malevich designed the set and the costumes, while Matyushin composed the music.

1914: Malevich leaves the "Union of Youth" in February and in March exhibits works in the Salon des Indépendants in Paris. With the outbreak of the First World War, he creates several anti-German propaganda posters in the *lubok* (Russian Folk-art) style.

1915: He shows his first Suprematist works at the second Futurist exhibition *Zero-Ten Exhibition* in St. Petersburg. The thirty-nine paintings in the radical new style are accompanied by a brochure about the "New Pictorial Realism", later Suprematism.

1917: The artist is elected to the Council of Soldiers' Deputies as the President of the artistic section in August, then to the Commission in charge of the preservation of valuables in the Kremlin after the October Revolution.

1918: Malevich founds the SVOMAS school, the acronym translating as "Free Art Studios". The first is in Petrograd; later he opens one in Moscow.

1920: The UNOVIS group (Affirmers of New Art) is created in Vitebsk. His daughter Una is born in April.

1922: Malevich finishes his great philosophical work *Suprematism, The Non-Objective World*. He leaves for Petrograd with the UNOVIS group.

1923: The artist is named director of the Museum of Artistic Culture in Petrograd. His second wife dies in the same year.

1924: He creates the Institute of Artistic Culture, known as INKHUK.

1925: He begins to introduce the idea of Suprematism in architecture, with his plaster models known as "architektons". He marries his third wife, Natalia Manchenko.

1926: INKHUK is closed down, and the collection is transferred to the Russian Museum.

1927: Malevich travels in Germany, including visits to Berlin and the Bauhaus in Dessau.

1930: The artist is arrested in Leningrad and imprisoned for a short while. His friends burn some of his written work in order to protect him.

1933: The first signs of cancer become apparent.

1935: Malevich exhibits several increasingly figurative works at the First Exhibition of Leningrad Painters. It would be twenty-seven years before his art would again be shown in the USSR. The artist dies on May 15 in Leningrad. His ashes are interred in Nemchinovka, near Leningrad, marked by a white cube with a black square created by Suetin.

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Very carefully, every worker watched the movements of machines as though they were the movements of a wild beast. At the same time, it was necessary to look after yourself, after your own actions. Any wrong movement could threaten either death or many kinds of injury. For me, as a child, all those machines always appeared like wild beasts. I looked on them as on wild relentless animals that only looked for any opportunities to knock down or injure their own enslavers. Enormous fly-wheels and belts always impressed me by their movements and structures. Some machines were fenced in behind metal rods and seemed as dogs in a cage. The other, less dangerous machines, were without fences."[1]

"I preferred to have friendships with peasants' children, considering them always free to live in the fields, meadows, and woods with horses, sheep and pigs. I always envied peasants' children who lived, as it seemed to me, free in nature. They grazed horses or huge herds of pigs. In the evening, they came back home astride the pigs holding onto their ears. Pigs galloped with squeals, much faster than horses and raised plenty of dust on village roads."[2]

That was a true fight. When I came home at the end of that day, my father punished me very hard. I bore my disgrace, but, deep inside, I felt myself as a hero."[3]

There was no end to our excitement. We spent two hours lying there. Then, the artists put aside their work and gathered together in the shade of the mill to have breakfast. They spoke loudly in Russian and laughed.

Taking advantage of this occasion, we crept away through the rye the same way back and then, when we got out from the field, we ran away at top speed."[4]

"Peredvizhniki" (Wanderers) was a name applied to members of the Russian Society of Itinerant Art Exhibitions. Ivan Kramskoi, Nikolai Ge, and thirteen other artists who had left the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts in protest against its rigid neo-classical dictates founded the society in 1870. In order to reach the widest audience possible, the society organized regular travelling exhibitions throughout the Russian Empire, including Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa in their tours. Murashko's work was more widely exhibited than Pymonenko's, appearing in Paris, Amsterdam and Munich, and there were one-man shows in Berlin, Cologne and Düsseldorf. [5]He was a co-founder of the Ukrainian State Academy of Arts in 1917 and served there as a professor and rector.

"The Revolution of 1905 happened. There were disturbances on the streets. I stood at my easel and continued to paint. The pressure rose. Fedociya (a cook) was our main informer. She informed us of any events from a group of the "Black Hundred". (*Author's note:* According to Lenin, the *Black Hundreds* championed the preservation and formal restoration of autocracy under the sceptre of their adored monarch. Their determination to defend the present Czar's government at all costs very often united them with the Octoberists.)[6]

The relative isolation of Eastern artists was eased quite a bit by these publications and private collections – especially in the case of Shchukin who opened his mansion to the public (and particularly to artists) to see and sketch the works. [7]

Previous schools and the *Peredvizhniki* of which I have been enamoured did so. They selected a proper theme: Polenov's *Christ and the Sinner*, Repin's *Revival of Iaira's Daughter*, and Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son* did the same thing. However, those masters put a theme to the main contents, which needed to be expressed, *by painting*. I come to another direction. *I did not wish to make painting as a method, but only a self-expression*. Ge (*Author's note*: in Italy during the 1860s the Russian painter of historical and scriptural themes, Nikolai Nikolayevich Ge, produced sketches with loose, expressive brushwork sometimes resembling Cézanne's.[8]) in his *Crucifixion* expressed feeling of his painting; he put it into his own theme. In his *Last Supper* he expressed a light effect for which he used

Judas's body. This figure became a way for achievement of the light effect.

My familiarity with the art of icons convinced me that the *thing* is not in studying an anatomy and a perspective, not in reproduction of nature in its truth, but the *thing* is in sensing art and an art realism. In other words, I saw that realism or a theme is what is necessary to reshape an ideal form what originated from aesthetic depth. Therefore, everything can be beautiful in art. Something that is not so good-looking and realized in the artistic plan of the art becomes admirable."[9]

The Russian-born artist was one of the first experimenters in pure abstraction in modern painting. His success in pursuing avant-garde exhibitions allowed him to found *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider; 1911-14) group in Munich and devoted himself totally to abstract painting. An accomplished musician, Kandinsky once said that colour was his keyboard: "…the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul." Kandinsky correlated colour based on parallel outcomes associated with music, such as tone equated with timbre (the sound's character), hue with pitch, and saturation with the volume of sound. He even claimed that when he saw colour he heard music.[10]

Of all his "homey" works depicting peasant life, one of the most revealing is *The Chiropodist at the Baths* (1911-1912). Its subject manages to be both humorous and sad at the same time, while revealing a bit of Russian life not usually paraded across art gallery walls. But the gouache has earned a place in art history for offending just about everybody. First, its compositional roots seem to lie in a traditional icon familiar to most Orthodox Russian Christians, the *Old Testament Trinity*. This often-reproduced icon depicts three angels seated around a table in the garden of Sarah and Abraham preparing to dine on a ritualistic meal which foretells the incarnation of Christ.[11]

Zaum postulated a world "beyond the mind state" where language and vision occur beyond the realm of conscious thought. The term was coined by Kruchenykh in 1913 and has been translated as "transreason" or "beyonsense". It is an experimental poetic language characterized by indeterminacy in meaning. As Kruchenykh has it, zaum is a transrational language, "wild, flaming, explosive (wild paradise, fiery languages,

blazing coal)," which awakens creative imagination from the manacles of everyday speech. Zaum "can provide a universal poetic language, born organically, and not artificially like Esperanto."[12]

This special level of über-concsiousness can only be perceived by those enlightened persons – mostly artists – who have been favoured with a highly evolved level of perception.[13]

Benois trod on one of Kasimir's 1915 exhibition pamphlets as "…not worth the paper it is printed on." He grouped Malevich's compatriots, wishing they would "…go away into a herd of swine and disappear into the depths of the sea." Hounding Malevich's repeated explanations, Benois excoriated the artist's 1922 paper, *God is Not cast Down* with "… some kind of pathological ventriloquy and degenerate madness by someone who imagines himself a prophet."[14]

"Being a painter doesn't prevent the artist from also being a writer, but he won't be able to practise both at the same time. Real painters are well aware that they must choose between painting, writing and speaking."[15]

To this the critic Nikolai Khardzhiev replied, "The energy of his 'heavy style' is appreciated by few. Even one of Malevich's closest students, El Lissitzky, who translated his articles into German, thought that '…his grammar was completely the wrong way round.' And yet Malevich had the remarkable quality of being able to capture the process of living thought. He wrote with extraordinary speed and practically without any changes."[16]

A sabre and candle hold the foreground stage in front of a vertical, white floating fish bisected by a short ladder that carries the eye to three bayonets. A red arrow whips behind this lot like an imperial sash across the chest of a top-hatted, high-collared man peering out at the viewer from behind the floating vertical fish. He grits his teeth and from his left ear (or where it would be) comes a row of saw teeth. Also bisecting the fish just below its head is a miniature painting of a Russian Orthodox Church with three cross-topped cupolas (*lukovitsy*) symbolizing candle flames and the prayers of the faithful, and representing the Holy Trinity.[17] The painting is topped by a red spoon, an iconic symbol for the Holy Communion where, in the Orthodox tradition, the gifts of bread and wine are carried to the

worshipper by spoon from the tray and chalice.[18]

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"The two words at the top and bottom of the canvas are *zatmeni* (eclipse) and *chastichnoe* (partial). Their most immediate reference is to the face half blocked by the vertical fish. The word for eclipse is further divided into another two words that convey the notion 'beyond the dark', or 'beyond that which is doing the obscuring'. Similarly, *chastichnoe* has been divided in such a way to isolate the word *chas* (hour) from the suffix of an adverbial adjective, - *noe* (hourly) The two words written across the scissors just to the right of the half face are *skakovoe obshchestvo* (galloping society). The semantic ambiguity in Russian is the same as it is in English: the phrase may connote a riding club, or society that in general is galloping into the future."[19]

Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity,* published in 1905, required time to be considered as a co-ordinate dimension to pinpoint the location of any event, making time – alongside the three spatial dimensions – a fourth dimension. As Hinton wrote: "Apart from the interest of speculations of this kind they have considerable value; for they enable us to express in intelligible terms things of which we can form no image. They supply us, as it were, with scaffolding, which the mind can make use of in building up its conceptions. And the additional gain to our power of representation is very great. "[20]

Riemann wrote: "Three spatial dimensions are obvious to its inhabitants and seem to exist at right angles to each other. Not noticed in local observations by its inhabitants, a "hidden" fourth spatial dimension

causes the three clearly recognizable spatial dimensions to lose their apparent orthogonal (having a set of mutually perpendicular axes; meeting at right angles) relationship eventually. On a global scale the four-space hypersphere has positively curved space, although it doesn't seem to be curved in the local vicinity any more than the lower-dimensional spherical surface does."[21] While the generally accepted concept of the fourth dimension recognized infinity, the space it occupied was more or less flat. In order to perceive the fourth dimension we had to dispose of our trust in the three dimensions that formed our recognizable world. To this conclusion, C.H. Hinton shook his head:

"It is somewhat curious to notice that we can thus conceive of an existence relative to that which we enjoy must exist as a mere abstraction."[22]

The ultimate form, or "zero form", was a black square suspended against white. Its opposite number would become the pure white form against a white background, indicating to Malevich "pure movement". This black square became his signature. Virtually the ultimate in static objects, the "Black Square" hangs suspended against its white background contrary to the "tensions and dynamic movement" promised by the Suprematists who included themselves as acolytes of the concepts penned in Malevich's densely convoluted manifesto that accompanied the work. Recent X-ray photography has revealed that the black paint actually covers a composition of coloured objects.[23] The surface or "face" of the square and other Suprematist shapes was a living thing to Malevich.

On the subject of this departure from object-art, Malevich said: "Excitement is a cosmic flame that lives on that which is objectless." And then to amplify this welding of concept and consequence he added "Excitement, like molten copper in a blast furnace, seethes in a state that is pure objectless. Excitement-combustion is the supreme white force that sets thought into motion. Excitement is like the flame of a volcano that flickers within a human being without the goal of meaning. A human being is like a volcano of excitements whereas thought is concerned with perfections."[24]

"In the final account, the technological system brings about the relation of humankind to the totality of being, a sort of pure, or absolute activity forever upgrading itself. Russia's leading avant-garde artist K. Malevich pushed this line of thinking to its logical end when he declared, writing

in 1919: “By my new being I put an end to the wasting of rational energy and bring to standstill the life of the green animal world. Everything will be directed towards the unity of mankind’s skull as a perfect tool of nature’s culture.”[25]

Malevich’s friend, the composer Nicolai Roslavits wrote: “In liberating himself from the power of the representational, the artist liberates art from the last fetters that have thus far prevented it from manifesting its true essence. And with the liberation of art will come crashing down all the fortresses of scholastic dogmatism erected by the bustling labour of the so-called ‘science of beauty’ – aesthetics – because it is the object from which all its tenets were derived and upon which it was built; not only did ‘things vanish like smoke’ from the artist’s field of vision, gone like smoke as well were the rotten foundations upon which they were based over entire centuries.”[26]

In a Nietzschean paean, Malevich clasped this eccentric to his bosom in a 1923 unpublished essay. “Marinetti and I spent our childhood and youth at the summit of Mount Etna; we only spoke to the devils that appeared in Etna’s smoke. We were mystics then, but the devils always tempted us with materialist science and proved that art had to be just as materialist. It is true that I was a bit slow to understand, but Marinetti, well, he took this idea to heart and wrote a manifesto that praised factory chimneys and everything produced inside factories.”[27]

Thus, the painter clearly distinguished between the objectless as an operative mode and ‘…the objectless generally speaking’ – that is, in a philosophical Suprematist sense. He deliberately did not seek a different word for the philosophical objectless. Malevich could have used objectivity (*obektivnost*) and non-objectivity (*neobektivnost*) to describe both the philosophical objectless and non-figurative art, which he does elsewhere, but according to my (Marcadé’s) hypothesis, he did not choose to do so because ‘objectivity/non-objectivity’ did not acknowledge his project, instead associating his thought with that of various other doctrines. There is almost a certain objectivity to Suprematism, the objectivity of the objectless, of the total absence of the object.”[28]

He felt the journal that strictly supported only the Suprematists was an important ideological tool necessary for the establishment of groundwork for his movement. He had great plans for subsequent issues.

The journal offered the opportunity to promote and develop discussion and to experiment with both writing and illustration. He called it his "laboratory house" (*dom-laboratoria*). Malevich had originally decided to title the journal *Nul* or "Nothing". In changing the title, he stepped a short distance from the "nothingness" of his philosophy via the minimal "zero" to a search for a utopian concept of art.[29]

"How terribly disappointing that our journal has not come out."[30]

"The keys of Suprematism led me to discover what had not yet been realized. My new painting does not belong to the Earth exclusively. The Earth has been abandoned like a house infected with termites. And in fact, in man, in his consciousness, there is a striving towards space. An urge to take off from the Earth…"[31]

"It is difficult to foresee the fate of any thought or discovery, whether it will be a reality, in what form, to what it will lead, to what extent it will change and improve human life, and whether it will radically transform our views and our science."[32]

"Non-objective art stands without windows and doors, like a pure sensation in which life, like a homeless tramp, desires to spend the night."[33]

Within ten years of creating Suprematism, Malevich had created a format for extending the impact of his work. "To explore the nature of an artist currently is the most important task," Malevich said. A Malevich student, K. I. Rozhdestvensky wrote: "That was the basis of his school. The first phase of his pedagogy was a purification from all influences. The task was to achieve a pure painterly culture and to bring into it additional elements. At that time it was important, since we had very many influences from all sides."[34]

UNOVIS membership included Vera Ermolaeva, El Lissitzky, Ilya Chashnik, Nikolai Suetin, Anna Leporskaya, Lev Yudin, Evgenia Magaril, Lazar Khidekel and others. Their loyalty and dedication to the principles of Suprematism continued on through to the end of their careers. UNOVIS groups were also organized in Orenburg, Smolensk, Saratov, Perm and other cities.[35]

"In the spiritual sense, Suprematist painting and Suprematist architecture are the same. Sometimes the birth of Suprematist

architecture is linked to the attempts to transfer painterly Suprematism to axonometry (*Author's note:* the revolution of co-ordinate planes. The intersection of single geometric objects. Projective geometry – definition, elements, point, line and plane, interval, calibration and the slope, intersection of single geometric objects, revolution of a plane into a projection plane.[36]) – but that is how *prouns* are born."

(*Author's note*: As created by EI Lissitzky: a *Proun* is a sculptural composition with several geometrical elements, both two and three-dimensional, dispersed across an uninflected ground in a manner that defies expectations of normal (or, indeed, possible) spatial relationships. Elements are arranged with little attention to the conventions of gravity, which has apparently been overcome (or at least countered by an equivalent upward force) in the infinite expanse of the *Proun* world. Interlocking and inter-related forms disturb equilibrium and 'curve' space; perspective devices distort the regularity of shapes, thereby creating the implication of potential movement. Contrasts of shape, scale and texture enhance these dynamic tensions.[37])

His problem arises when Malevich stops painting and begins to write brochures. I heard that the Germans were also taken aback by his writings. I made an attempt to read the grandiloquent and obscure theoretical works by the leader of the "Suprematists". In a confused manner he seems to try somehow to link his goals and path with the Revolution and God."[38]

The glass curtain wall suspended in front of the load-bearing framework defined the exterior of the workshop wing and openly showed the constructive elements. Gropius, rather than visually amplifying the corners of the cubic body of the building, allowed the glass surface to overlap the edges, thereby creating the impression of lightness. Gropius consistently separated the parts of the Bauhaus building according to their functions and designed each differently. As though manipulating Suprematist geometrics, he thereby arranged the different wings asymmetrically – in relation to what is today the Bauhausstraße and the Gropiusallee respectively. In order to appreciate the overall design of the complex, the observer must therefore move around the whole building; there is no central viewpoint. Malevich would have responded to this virtual architekton floating in space.[39]

From his work it is not hard to observe that Malevich had good days and

bad days. Even to hang these later works he had to resort to backdating them to pre-Revolutionary times, 1905, 1909, etc. How must it have been for this man to watch his world shrink as the grinding wheels of government mandates and bureaucracy continued to encapsulate creativity and subjugate it to the needs of the state? How many friends had disappeared? He had no money to speak of and food shortages made every day a search for something on the shelves to put in the pot. As his ability to provide diminished, the price of bread – the Soviet staple – climbed. Fifty kilograms of bread cost 13.5 roubles in January 1934; by April the price had climbed to 27 roubles and by January 1935 Soviet citizens paid 60 roubles for their bread.[40]

During the all-talk-and-no-art period, strong proclamations were issued by the art groups that made them sound more like militias: “mobilize!” “battlegrounds”, “victory”, “defeat” and “shock troops”.[41] This rhetoric tempered as the Party softened its stand on vigorous conformity and emphasized “co-operation” between artists and writers, a unification of the arts. Political and social priorities shifted from the stick to the carrot and, in 1932, beautiful old antiques were pried out of storage.

The paintings of Ilya Repin were dusted off following his death in 1930 and members of the once proud *Peredvizhniki* were resurrected. Writers were herded together to form an alliance that supported the Party platform with promises that a similar “alignment” of artists would occur. The Central Committee’s new policy for the arts called up the sacred cow of ‘tradition” around which to rally.[42]

Malevich found himself hunted by critics no matter which way he turned. Anyone who had shown any sympathy toward the *kulaks*, peasants, priests, the intelligentsia and those who had voted for the NEP now had suspicions levelled at their heads. Even his latest exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in 1929 had been savaged by terrified contemporaries led by prominent artists such as Constructivist Alexei Gan. Along with Varvara Stepanova, Gan had proclaimed Constructionism as the “creation of communistic expression of material structures” which creations were to be defined by three major elements: tectonics, *faktura* (texture), and construction, by which they meant the process of organization and structuring materials.[43]

“After Suprematism and with its assistance, Malevich’s urge towards

colour found expression in a new, enriched interpretation ... these new works [of the 1930s] should not be regarded as an unexpected or new course of development, but as the evolution of the colour principle germane to Malevich's early works ... This constitutes the spiritual content of Kazimir Severinovich, powerful and deep, rich in its unity."[44]

"None of Malevich's relatives showed any interest in his works after 1936. On the contrary, as Vassily Pushkarev recalled, they attempted to distance themselves both from Malevich's name and his œuvre."[45]